

Lesbian Feelings and Fandoms:
Carmilla and Affect in Contemporary Lesbian Fandom

by

Sneha Shilip Kumar

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral
Affairs in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Film Studies

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

© 2020, Sneha Shilip Kumar

Abstract

My thesis explores the contemporary lesbian web series as being similar to fanfiction and its fandom as an affective community built on a set of inclusions and exclusions. My case study is *Carmilla* (Canada, Spencer Maybee 2014-2016), a YouTube web series shot in vlog format, and its lesbian fandom. I argue that *Carmilla* challenges the genres of the gothic and lesbian vampire in ways similar to fanfiction. Building on the work of fan studies scholars Katrin Döveling and Louisa Stein, I propose that affective bonds are created between *Carmilla* fans through various kinds of online activities and these flows of affect are influenced by the race and location of fans. My experiences at the first CarmillaCon in Toronto suggest that the online and offline *Carmilla* fandom both create and reflect each other.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the *Carmilla* fandom for many reasons: giving me community when I thought I had none; allowing me to feel acceptance when I felt uncomfortable in my own skin; getting me through long nights filled with many assignments; and finally, providing me with the resources to successfully write my thesis.

There are so many people I have to thank for giving me the strength and guidance to finish this project. First and foremost, I am indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Laura Horak. You listened to me rambling about this series that I loved and gave my thoughts structure. Your comments, questions, and ideas made me see things in a light I would never have considered before. Secondly, I would like to express my appreciation for Dr. Aubrey Anable. Not only were you central to the process of establishing a tentative bibliography and literature review for this project, it was your Media and Emotion class that led me to my central argument. Thirdly, thank you to my extremely supportive roommates, Andriyha Soans and Anamika Jayendran. You patiently listened to all my ideas, read drafts, and even conceded to watching *Carmilla*. Thank you for being my home away from home. Last but not the least, I must express gratitude for my parents. You may not fully understand what I study or my motivations for writing about this particular topic, but you have always stood by me unflinchingly. I appreciate you constantly asking about my progress and listening to my complex explanations. I love you.

To Carmilla, Laura, LaFontaine, Perry, Danny, Kirsch, Will, JP, Mattie, Mel, Theo, and The Dean, I hope I did your story justice.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Illustrations	iv
Introduction: So Many Feelings	1
Chapter 1: Contextualizing <i>Carmilla</i>	9
Chapter 2: Bitten by Feelings - The Online <i>Carmilla</i> Fandom as a Lesbian Community of Feeling	27
Chapter 3: <i>Carmilla</i> in the World - Globality and Race in the <i>Carmilla</i> Fandom	51
Chapter 4: Attending CarmillaCon - Lesbians, Affect, Inclusion, and Exclusion	70
Conclusion: Thanks for Watching!	92
Works Cited	96

List of Illustrations

Figure 1: Vampires Get Their Periods	18
Figure 2: A Buffy/Carmilla Crossover	22
Figure 3: Screenshot Of My Youtube Recommendations	36
Figure 4: Exchanging Positive Affect.....	39
Figure 5: Screenshot Of Tumblr Blog	45
Figure 6: Beating Heart Meme	49
Figure 7: My Interaction With A Fellow Indian Carmilla Fan.....	52
Figure 8: Global Creampuff Domination.....	54
Figure 9: Matska Belmonde (Sophia Walker); Source: The Mary Sue	58

Introduction: So Many Feelings

It would never have dawned on my 19-year-old self that one day I would be writing a thesis on the Canadian lesbian web series *Carmilla* (Spencer Maybee, 2014-2016). *Carmilla* is a contemporary adaptation of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's 1872 novella of the same name. The series follows human Laura Hollis (Elise Bauman), her vampire lover Carmilla Karnstein (Natasha Negovanlis), and their group of friends as they fight ancient gods, a hostile university administration, and other supernatural beings.

I discovered the series as a young queer undergraduate student in Pune, India, sitting in the library and looking for something new to watch. I remember, in vivid detail, the butterflies I felt while watching Carmilla and Laura fall in love. I cried when they broke up, when they lost friends and family, and burst into applause when they finally prevailed over The Dean.

One early morning my mother burst into my room in panic, only to find me shouting "Hollis, you're so stupid!" at my laptop screen. My many revisitations to *Carmilla* and participation in its online fandom made me want to explore why I and others felt so intensely about this series. The language of affect theory gave me tools to do so. The organization of the first CarmillaCon while I was writing my thesis provided the opportunity to also observe the *Carmilla* fandom offline. In this project I argue that the similarity of the *Carmilla* series to a fan work encourages the formation of a digital affective community through the exchange of positive affect between *Carmilla* fans on YouTube, Archive of Our Own (AO3), and Tumblr. This community is based on a series of inclusions and exclusions, which are also found in the offline fandom.

I chose to focus on a web series because it is an audiovisual format that has little scholarship on it. I chose *Carmilla* in particular because of my interest in the series and participation in its fandom, and the fact that there is even less scholarship about queer web

series. *Carmilla* is a queer web series not only because most of the characters identify as LGBTQ+ but also because a majority of its cast and crew is queer. *Carmilla*'s reconfiguration of the lesbian vampire, tackling of the harassment young women and gender diverse students face on university campuses, and the omnipresent Dean as the monstrous mother seem to both challenge and reinforce traditional conceptions of female sexuality, ambition, and excess. I have not come across another lesbian show that directly speaks to these issues.

The *Carmilla* web series has three seasons, released in 2014, 2015, and 2016 respectively. Each season has 36 episodes. The creators also released a Christmas Special as part of the first season and a season zero, released between season two and three, which has 12 episodes. A crowdfunded feature film, *The Carmilla Movie* (Spencer Maybee), was released in 2017. I chose not to focus on the film because the film's visual and narrative work would require its own thesis.

The *Carmilla* fandom seems to be a current iteration of a kind of lesbian fandom that can be traced back to *Xena: The Warrior Princess* (1995-2001), wherein the series gives fans the opportunity to discover their sexuality, form communities, and escape from daily life.¹ *Carmilla* and its fandom are similar to the contemporary fan cultures surrounding other queer fantasy media in that fans of the series come together on similar platforms (e.g. Tumblr, Archive of Our Own, Tumblr) and in similar physical spaces (e.g., ClexaCon, Love Fan Fest). There are also significant overlaps amongst fans of queer fantasy media. For example, some *Carmilla* fans are also part of the *Wynonna Earp* (2016 – present) fandom. *Wynonna Earp* is a Canadian sci-fi TV show that features a group of women, two of them in a relationship with each other, fighting demons. Both *Carmilla* and *Wynonna Earp* reference previous TV shows with large fandoms i.e. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* TV series (1997-2003) and *Supernatural*

¹ Liz Millward, "New Xenaland: Lesbian Place Making, the Xenaverse, and Aotearoa New Zealand," *Gender, Place & Culture* 14, no. 4 (2007): 427:443.

(2005-present) respectively. However, even compared to *Wynonna Earp*, *Carmilla* has a relatively small fandom. Its size allows the series' fans, creators, and actors to develop more intimate relationships as compared to larger fandoms like *Buffy*. *Carmilla* is also part of a contemporary wave of low-budget lesbian web series filmed in vlog format that rewrite classical texts, such as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (2012-2013) and *Middlemarch: The Series* (2017).

I chose three particular platforms for my analysis of the *Carmilla* fandom online: YouTube, Archive of Our Own (AO3), and Tumblr. I chose YouTube because the site hosts the *Carmilla* series and the vlog format of the series prompts interesting relationships between the characters of *Carmilla* and its audience. I chose AO3 because all the *Carmilla* fanfiction I have read has been hosted there. The fanfiction site encourages affective bonds among fans of the series through popular tags, the kudos (or heart) function, and comments on fanfic. Finally, as an avid user of Tumblr myself, I was witness to how the reblogging feature is used to communicate shared interests. I chose not to focus on *Carmilla* on Reddit and Twitter because fans use these platforms more to discuss their love for the series and less to participate in traditionally fannish practices such as fanfiction, fan art, and fanvideos.

The material that I analyze in this thesis includes *Carmilla* episodes, comments on YouTube and AO3, fanfiction, Tumblr blogs, Tumblr posts, CarmillaCon panels, and my own experiences. I perform close analyses of these varied primary sources using the lenses of affect theory and fan studies. Being a fan of *Carmilla* myself, it was easy for me to choose which episodes to refer to, what comments, fanfiction, Tumblr blogs, and Tumblr posts to analyze, and to interact with *Carmilla* fans at CarmillaCon with an equal amount of passion for the series. However, when I began to write it was difficult for me to critically analyze the fandom because of my closeness to it. I often found myself resorting to fan-like language. My biggest challenge lay in not lapsing into uninhibited praise of the series. Still, in the process of

formulating my arguments I betray very personal passions and interests; something that is difficult to avoid as an “aca-fan,” according to fan scholars Katherine Larsen and Lynn Zubernis.²

English scholar Cécile Cristofari and behavior studies scholar Matthieu J. Guitton argue that the position of the “aca-fan” comes with greater access to fan communities, which creates several ethical and practical concerns.³ During the course of my thesis I had to ask myself some difficult questions: Should I share the usernames of commentators, fanfiction writers, and Tumblr users? I decided not use usernames in the body of my text and only mention them in citations. Fans do not post reactions to a media object or their work on the internet with the thought that it will be used for someone’s research. By not mentioning usernames in the body of the text, I hope to respect their privacy. However, I chose to mention their usernames in my citations with the aim to help other researchers assess the veracity of my claims and use my arguments to support their own. Another question that plagued me was how should I borrow from *Carmilla*’s fan community without seeming to appropriate other people’s work? Cristofari and Guitton claim that an important way in which to mediate these issues is to ensure that as an “aca-fan” you not only take from the fandom but also contribute significantly to it.⁴ Through this thesis I hope to give back to the online fan community that got me through some tough times.

In this thesis, I intervene into scholarship on lesbian vampires in cinema, fan studies, and affect theory. I build on the work of film scholars Andrea Weiss and Barbara Creed to situate the *Carmilla* series in the history of lesbian vampire representation, particularly the

² Katherine Larsen and Lynn Zubernis, introduction to *Fan Culture: Theory/Practice*, ed. Katherine Larsen and Lynn Zubernis (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 4.

³ Cécile Cristofari and Matthieu J. Guitton, “Aca-fans and Fan Communities: An Operative Framework”, *Journal of Consumer Culture* 17, no. 3 (2017): 724.

⁴ Cristofari and Guitton, “Aca-fans and Fan Communities, 724.

multiple previous adaptations of Le Fanu's novella.⁵ Creed's argument about the association of the vampire with menstruation plays an interesting role in the *Carmilla* series considering the series was produced by U by Kotex, a menstrual hygiene brand. I argue that *Carmilla* both challenges and reinforces traditional understandings of the lesbian vampire. Weiss's lesbian vampire poses a threat to the heterosexual male, but is eventually destroyed by the patriarchy. *Carmilla* seems to actively and successively resist the patriarchy, more often than not killing gatekeepers of systemic oppression. However, she does fall into the trap of a lesbian vampire whose indiscretions are forgiven because of her social status. *Carmilla* is white, rich and conventionally feminine. The series also reinforces the notion of the monstrous mother, full of ambition and excess, in the form of The Dean.

Most scholarship on lesbian fandom focuses more on subtextual or "fanon" lesbian relationships rather than canonical "women loving women" (wlw) relationships. Fan scholars Julie Levin Russo and Mel Stanfill have engaged with femslash fandoms extensively. Russo's body of work does provide considerable insight into the history of queer female fandom, once again choosing to focus on "fanon" lesbians.⁶ Stanfill addresses a number of issues in "femslash" fandom along the lines of race and class, choosing to look at a number of femslash fandoms, fanon and canon alike.⁷ Her research has been integral to my exploration of exclusions in the online *Carmilla* fandom. Through this thesis I aim to somewhat fill the gap in academic work about narratives that center lesbian experiences. I do something similar in reference to the lesbian fan convention. While there has been some scholarship on the affective

⁵ Andrea Weiss, *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film*, (London: Penguin Books, 1993).

⁵ Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, (New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁶ Julie Levin Russo, "Textual Orientation: Queer Female Fandom Online," in *The Routledge Companion to Media and Gender*, ed. Cynthia Carter et al. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 450-460.

⁷ Mel Stanfill, "Fans of Color in Femslash," *Transformative Works and Cultures* 29 (2019): n.p.

work of Cons and their inclusions and exclusions, not much has been written about the circuit of lesbian fan conventions.⁸ By dedicating a chapter to CarmillaCon, a convention for the *Carmilla* fandom that took place in Toronto, I hope to spur a conversation about the fans, moderators, actors, creators, producers and moderators that circulate across lesbian Cons.

I locate my thesis at the intersection of fan studies and affect theory. Fan studies scholars Katrin Döveling, Anu A. Harju and Denise Sommer have written about celebrity fandoms as digital affect cultures, a concept that I apply to the *Carmilla* fandom as well.⁹ While their work mentions that digital affect cultures are formed on the basis of shared rituals, they do not expand on the types of rituals common to fandom. I claim that writing, reading, and commenting on femslash fanfiction on Archive of Our Own (AO3) and reblogging posts on Tumblr are the kinds of ritualistic practices that make the *Carmilla* fandom a digital affect culture. Central to my understanding of the online *Carmilla* fandom as an affective community is the work of lesbian scholar Ann Cvetkovich. Cvetkovich argues that when lesbian lives are made public through performance, archives of lesbian feeling are created.¹⁰ The *Carmilla* series and its associated fandom also form archives of lesbian feeling through their representation of the queer via vlogs and femslash fanfiction respectively. Cvetkovich's work focuses primarily on physical lesbian publics whereas the *Carmilla* fandom is a digital lesbian public. In this project I analyse how the physical and digital public are similar and different from each other.

In chapter one, "Contextualizing *Carmilla*," I lay out the three traditions that gave birth to *Carmilla*: the lesbian in Gothic literature, the tradition of the lesbian vampire in cinema, and the vampire in contemporary media. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of *Carmilla*'s

⁸ See Larsen and Zubernis 2012, Lamerichs 2016.

⁹ Katrin Döveling, Anu A. Harji and Denise Sommer "From Mediatized Emotion to Digital Affect Cultures: New Technologies and Global Flows of Emotion," *Social Media + Society* 4, no. 1 (2018): 1-11.

¹⁰ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

similarities and differences to fanfiction. Drawing on the scholarship of English scholar Sarah Parker, I attempt to situate the *Carmilla* series within the Gothic tradition.¹¹ I argue that *Carmilla* both extends and subverts the history of lesbian vampire representation in cinema, as laid out by Andrea Weiss and Barbara Creed. An important caveat of the lesbian vampire in cinema is the presence of the figure in contemporary media. *Carmilla* references both *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* TV series (1997-2003) and the *Twilight* franchise (2008-2012) in myriad ways. Referring to the work of media scholar Aymar Jean Christian, I propose that while *Carmilla* may be produced by industrial players, its origins lie in fan cultures.¹² *Carmilla*'s status as a queer-made fan product then attracts a fandom that is queer and primarily lesbian. These lesbian fans come together online and in public spaces on the basis of shared interests and create affective communities.

In chapter two, "Bitten by Feelings: The Online *Carmilla* Fandom as a Lesbian Community of Feeling," I argue that positive affects traded between *Carmilla* fans online lead to the creation of lesbian communities of feeling. The three online platforms that I focus on are YouTube, AO3 and Tumblr. I categorise *Carmilla* on YouTube and AO3 as archives of lesbian feeling and affinity spaces. I do not consider Tumblr as an archive of lesbian feeling, but I do read it as an affinity space. Affinity spaces are social spaces online, which bring people together on the basis of shared interests. I argue that the coming together of archives of lesbian feeling and affinity spaces create digital affect cultures. Digital affect cultures are the products of ritualised practices that encourage a sense of belonging amongst their members.

In chapter three, "*Carmilla* in the World: Exploring Globality and Race in the *Carmilla* Fandom," I grapple with the idea of the global nature of the online *Carmilla* fandom by drawing

¹¹ Sarah Parker, "'The Darkness is the Closet in Which Your Lover Roots Her Heart': Lesbians, Desire and the Gothic Genre," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 9, no. 2 (2008): 4-19.

¹² Aymar Jean Christian, "Fandom as Industrial Response: Producing Identity in an Independent Web Series," *Transformative Works and Cultures* 8 (2012): n.p.

on my own experiences as an Indian lesbian fan, referring to an online *Carmilla* fandom map, and analyzing the global network of Carmilla captioners responsible for subtitling the series' episodes. I argue that the global nature of the *Carmilla* fandom is tilted towards the Americas and Europe. The majority of *Carmilla*'s cast and crew are white. My analysis of how the Carmilla fandom tackles race is based primarily on the creators' and fandom's treatment of the relationship between Danny Lawrence (Sharon Belle), who is white, and Matska or Mattie Belmonde (Sophia Walker), who is black. I also pinpoint elements of racial tension between The Dean and Laura. While the online *Carmilla* fandom may be a community bound together by shared investment in a media object, the fandom's reaction to characters and fans of color make explicit the presence of national and racial boundaries in the creation of fandom.

In chapter four, "Attending CarmillaCon: Lesbians, Affect, Inclusion and Exclusion," I argue that the fan convention creates an affective space in which actors, moderators, fans and volunteers engage in acts of inclusion and exclusion based on class and race. Furthermore, through these processes of inclusion and exclusion the online and offline worlds of the *Carmilla* fandom parallel and co-constitute one another. I begin the chapter by focusing on the rising lesbian matrix of fan conventions, particularly ClexaCon, Love Fan Fest, and CarmillaCon. I conceptualize these Con spaces as lesbian spaces, a term I borrow from gender studies scholar Liz Millward, that allow the real lives of queer fans to tangle with fictional lesbian worlds.¹³ My analysis of the affective work of CarmillaCon and its inclusions and exclusions is based on my observations and experiences there, in conversation with the scholarship of fan studies scholars such as Katherine Larsen and Lynn Zubernis.

To quote Laura Hollis in "Nancy Drew" (S1, E9), "We're gonna figure this out!" By this I am referring to the complexities of the Carmilla fandom as a lesbian community of feeling. And by we, I mean you and me together.

¹³ Millward, "New Xenaland," 428.

Chapter 1: Contextualizing *Carmilla*

1.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the three traditions that the *Carmilla* web series has grown out of: the spectre of the lesbian in Gothic literature, the history of lesbian vampires in film, and contemporary vampire media. Drawing on these three traditions, *Carmilla* occupies a kind of grey area between fan work and industrial product. Most of the series' cast and crew are queer, including producer Stephanie Ouaknine and story editor Ellen Simpson, as well as actors Natasha Negovanlis (*Carmilla*), Elise Bauman (*Laura*), Kaitlyn Alexander (*LaFontaine*) and Matt O'Connor (*Wilson Kirsch*). I argue that the series creators make interventions into these three traditions in order to reflect a version of contemporary queer desire, focusing on the experiences of a middle-class white lesbian university student. Though the series' creators identify as fans of popular vampire and lesbian media and the series as an expression of their love, the project was produced by a professional production company and is commercially distributed.

Drawing on the work of literary and film scholars such as Sarah Parker, Andrea Weiss, and Barbara Creed, in this chapter I will investigate *Carmilla's* gothic past, situate the *Carmilla* series in a history of lesbian vampire representation, and analyse the series' references to other kinds of vampire-related media. In conversation with media scholar Aymar Jean Christian, I will also explore *Carmilla's* in-between status that builds upon both fan and industrial communities and that encourages the formation of a lesbian fandom built upon feeling.

1.2 *Carmilla's* Gothic past

The *Carmilla* series' Gothic past can be traced back to the 1872 novella it is based on—*Carmilla* by Irish author Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu. Film scholars Andrea Weiss, Barbara

Creed, and David Baker credit this novella with being one of two source texts for almost all lesbian vampire media. (The other is the historical figure of Countess Elizabeth Bathory [1560-1614] who was accused of killing over 600 young women and bathing in their blood to maintain her youth and beauty). *Carmilla*, the novella, was set in the real town of Styria, Austria. In the novella, a young and naive Laura befriends Carmilla after Carmilla's carriage breaks down in front her mansion. Carmilla and Laura develop a fast friendship, which eventually leads to Carmilla pursuing her romantically. Laura begins to have feverish dreams after meeting Carmilla, particularly of a cat-like creature biting her on the breast. The discovery of this bite by a male doctor from the village leads to the uncovering of Carmilla's plot and ultimately her death at the hands of Baron Vordenberg, a descendent of the family that rid the area of vampires years ago. Carmilla is staked through the heart, her head cut off, and her body burnt and thrown into the river. The novella serves as a cautionary tale against the evils of lesbianism and restores the male to the position of active agent.

According to British author John W. Cousin, Le Fanu was famous for presenting the mysterious and the supernatural.¹⁴ English scholar Sarah Parker claims that the Gothic genre is associated with the desire to articulate what is unspeakable or repressed.¹⁵ Similarly, English scholar Anne Williams argues that the Gothic is defined less by specific motifs such as the haunted castle or monster, and more by a concern for boundaries, such as the physical limitations of domestic space.¹⁶ The Gothic is often organised around what happens when repressed desires lead to the destruction of a patriarchal family unit. Lesbian desire is one example of the transgression of familial boundaries. Women's fiction scholar Paulina Palmer claims that the most common themes explored in lesbian gothic texts are a woman's

¹⁴ John W. Cousin, *A Short Biographical Dictionary of English Literature*, (Frankfurt am Main: Outlook Verlag, 2018), 780.

¹⁵ Parker, "The Darkness is the Closet in Which Your Lover Roots Her Heart," 7.

¹⁶ Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), 22.

problematic relationship with her body, transgressive aspects of female sexuality, intricacies of female friendships, relationships between mother and daughter, portrayals of women as both hero and victim of persecution, and the haunting of one woman by another.¹⁷ Along these lines, Le Fanu's novella portrays female sexuality as deviant, warns against the development of close friendships between young women, and shows how the meek, virginal, pure Laura becomes a victim of the mysterious, sexual, strong Carmilla. One important difference between Le Fanu's text and the typical lesbian gothic text is that while the women tend to be either victims or villains, all the heroes in *Carmilla* are men.

The *Carmilla* web series echoes many of these Gothic lesbian tropes, although in a more comic mode. Carmilla complains about having to menstruate for hundreds of years and she seduces a series of young women. The show depicts the friendship between a group of primarily queer women. Carmilla's relationship with her bloodthirsty mother is strained. Carmilla's character is portrayed as both hero and victim of abuse. However, in contrast to the novella, the *Carmilla* series separates the categories of the monstrous and the lesbian. I consider the *Carmilla* series as a response to the Gothic lesbian tradition: it challenges the doom and gloom of the genre through moments of humor and lightness, while retaining certain aspects of the genre, such as old buildings with muddled histories and supernatural mystery. For example, in "Disorientation" (S1, Ep 1) Laura describes a sentient search window looking for Dudley Chapel, a building on campus that burnt down in 1904. She describes the fire as "harmless prank or terrifying mystery waiting..." before she is interrupted by her party girl roommate Betty (Grace Glowicki).

According to English scholar Anne Williams, the Gothic genre's engagement with the repressed creates the opportunity to explore the psychological state of women. Referring to

¹⁷ Paulina Palmer, *Lesbian Gothic: Transgressive fictions*, (London and New York: Cassell, 1999), 10.

Charlotte Brontë's 1847 Gothic novel *Jane Eyre*, she argues that the book's madwoman in the attic serves as a metaphor for the transgressive nature of the genre: "the madwoman, though hidden and confined...seems fully capable of escaping her confinement and burning the house down."¹⁸ While the "Female Gothic," a term coined by literary scholar Ellen Moers, focuses on women's experiences of patriarchal domestic space—her experiences are seen as journey towards some kind of agency in a world dominated by men—the "Male Gothic" depicts the male character as controlling the passive female victim.¹⁹ Le Fanu's *Carmilla* is a classic example of the Male Gothic genre. In contrast, the *Carmilla* series takes advantage of the repressed lesbianism present in the novella and brings what was "unspeakable into articulation."²⁰

I argue that the *Carmilla* series is one answer to the question posed by sexuality studies scholar Sarah Parker: "[W]hat if lesbian authors were to wield the Gothic for their own ends?"²¹ Not only does the *Carmilla* series include certain Gothic motifs, such as an old, Victorian-era university with a Town Hall and chapel that burnt down in the 20th century, the series also incorporates the narrative elements of nightmares. Furthermore, if, as Anne Williams argues, the Gothic is structured around the patriarchal family, then it must be noted that all the supposed monsters in the *Carmilla* series - Carmilla, Carmilla's sister Mattie Belmonde (Sophia Walker), and Carmilla's mother The Dean - all faced untold horrors at the hands of men.

The *Carmilla* series gives all three of these women the space to exact their revenge. For example, the hero who destroys Carmilla in the novella, Baron Vordenberg, is one of the main antagonists in season two. He describes Carmilla as a "ravager of virtue" in "Emergency Procedures" (S2, E13), a description that reflects the heterosexual man's anxiety about the

¹⁸ Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 8.

¹⁹ Michelle Denise Wise, *"I am a Monster, Just Like She Said": Monstrous Lesbians in Contemporary Gothic Film*, PhD Dissertation, Middle Tennessee State University (2016): 20.

²⁰ Parker, "The Darkness is the Closet in Which Your Lover Roots Her Heart," 8.

²¹ Parker, "The Darkness is the Closet in Which Your Lover Roots Her Heart," 8.

lesbian vampire. In the series, Vordenberg tells Laura that as a countess, Carmilla was promised to his great-great grandfather, who was deeply in love with her. That love prompted him to hide her when she became a monster and in return she killed his entire family. However, in a flashback scene from “Co-Existence” (S2, E30), Mattie reveals that Vordenberg’s ancestor was in fact a necrophiliac that stole Carmilla’s body from her grave and kept her locked in a dungeon. After freeing herself from his shackles, Carmilla killed his family in revenge. I interpret Baron Vordenberg as representative of the patriarchal system that permeates the gothic; in the series, his character is dedicated to ridding Silas University of the monstrous, including lesbianism. His death in the last episode of season two at the hands of lesbian human Laura Hollis is an example of how the lesbian can transform the gothic.

Le Fanu’s Laura and the *Carmilla* series’ Laura have certain similarities, but are also vastly different. While both Lauras are kind, sweet, and sensitive, Le Fanu’s Laura is a passive recipient of her father’s orders, her handmaids’ gossip, and Carmilla’s charms. In contrast, Laura from the series actively attempts to write her own destiny, refusing to be a pawn in the plans of ancient gods, vampires, and vampire slayers. Laura’s character seems inspired by a character from another popular Gothic vampire novel, Mina Harker from Bram Stoker’s 1897 novel *Dracula*. In “Best Laid Plans” (S1, Ep 16), while discussing her plans to lure in and trap her vampire roommate, Laura asks “What would Mina Harker do?” Just as Mina Harker, who appears in Bram Stoker’s novel and most of its filmic adaptations, mounts an attack against Dracula by collecting evidence of his assaults against innocent women, Laura Hollis amasses evidence against Carmilla to prove that she was involved in the disappearance of multiple girls on campus, including Laura’s roommate, Betty. However, the parallels between Laura and Harker end here—the former becomes romantically entangled with her vampire roommate and they get a happy ending, while the latter is turned into a vampire by Dracula and then rescued by vampire-hunter Professor Abraham Van Helsing. Mina Harker’s happy ending comes in the

form of a husband and son. In *Dracula*, the vampire's destruction is corrected by the heterosexual family, whereas in the *Carmilla* series, the happy ending is reserved for the lesbian human-vampire couple.

The creators of the *Carmilla* series manipulate Gothic convention to a degree that destabilizes the very narrative structure of the genre. The series directly confronts the Gothic's tendency to centre the heterosexual experience as triumphing over the monster. The *Carmilla* series attempts to liberate the lesbian vampire from the confines of the Gothic by making Baron Vordenberg an antagonist and ensuring that Carmilla survives his wrath with the help of her friends.

1.3 Sex, blood, and rock 'n' roll – *Carmilla* and cinema's lesbian vampires

Why does the lesbian vampire continue to hold such importance in popular culture? Andrea Weiss argues that the persistence of the association between lesbianism and vampirism can be traced back to a large number of lesbian vampire novels that appeared in the first half of the twentieth century and representations of lesbians in cinema.²² According to lesbian historian Lillian Faderman, the vampire metaphor served to explain the transition from socially-accepted close female friendships in the nineteenth century to the redefinition of such friendships as deviant in the first half of the twentieth century.²³ I further attribute the attractiveness of the vampire to their status as both insider and outside, in that the vampire is often a rich and intellectual figure but also represents the debased parts of human sexuality. As a result vampires are able to move amongst the upper echelons of society even whilst giving into their hunger and lust.

²² Weiss, *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film*, 84, 87.

²³ Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present*, (New York: William Morrow, 1981), 342.

While lesbian vampire films span almost a century, from at least the 1930s to the present, the period between the late 1960s and early 1970s has been most studied. These films include *Black Sunday* (Italy, Mario Bava, 1960), *The Vampire Lovers* (UK, Roy Baker, 1970), *Vampyros Lesbos – Die Erbin des Dracula* (Germany/Spain, Jess Franco, 1971), *Twins of Evil* (UK, John Hough, 1971), and *Lust for a Vampire* (UK, Jimmy Sangster, 1971).²⁴ Feminist film scholar Barbara Creed argues that the lesbian vampire film of the 1970s openly explored the relationship between sex, violence, and death.²⁵ The emphasis on sex is connected to the lesbian vampire's power of seduction, which has both a positive and negative connotation. The lesbian vampire's decision to seduce her victims rather than kill them gestures toward a desire to turn her victims into accomplices. A similar phenomenon can be seen in *Carmilla*. As Laura figures out in "A Visit From The Dean" (S1, Ep 11), it is Carmilla's "study buddies" that are being abducted— "study buddies" referring to her various sexual partners. I see another common trope of the lesbian vampire genre in the disappearance of Carmilla's "study buddies," which is that violence is meted out to those women that the vampire is sexually attracted to. Carmilla's ex-girlfriend Elle and Laura also face particular hardships because of their romantic association with Carmilla.

In *The Vampire Lovers* and *Twins of Evil*, two of the three Hammer Film productions based on the *Carmilla* novella, Carmilla is portrayed as the main villain because of her enjoyment in seducing and ultimately destroying women. However, in the *Carmilla* series, the main antagonist is not Carmilla, it is her mother, The Dean. While Carmilla does enjoy the process of seduction in the series, she is painfully aware of the end that will meet the women who fall in love with her and therefore does everything in her power to save them.

²⁴ Weiss, *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film*, 84.

²⁵ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, 224.

According to Weiss, the lesbian vampire terrifies the male spectator by articulating anxieties about his maleness, only to reaffirm that maleness through the vampire's death.²⁶ In *The Vampire Lovers*, Laura's father General Spielsdorf (Peter Cushing) leads a team of vampire hunters toward killing and ultimately decapitating Carmilla. General Spielsdorf is depicted with a stiff body, one that exudes a cold and cruel demeanour. The series turns Laura's father into a caring man who eventually reconciles himself with Carmilla. He first appears in "All the Rage" (S3, Ep 8). While he does not condone Laura's relationship with a vampire—more out of over-protectiveness rather than prejudice—he and Carmilla end up bonding over their shared interest in Laura's safety. Initially, he insists on taking Laura back home, but after finding out about The Dean's plan to unleash hell on earth, Laura convinces her father that she cannot leave with him. His heart-to-heart with Carmilla happens in "Memory Lane" (S3, Ep 12). After having a minor tussle with Laura about wearing protective gear when she goes on her quests, Carmilla confronts him with the idea that putting Laura in an ivory tower may not be the best way to protect her. Their conversation eventually leads to him boasting about all the injustices Laura fought against as a child. Mr. Hollis is simultaneously proud of and terrified for his daughter. He is sometimes smothering but always willing to listen to her. In this, he reminds me of my mother. In fact, his depiction as a slightly overbearing but fiercely loving single dad is almost anti-patriarchal. While his daughter's sexuality poses no problems for him and he does not bat an eyelash when Laura's friend LaFontaine (Kaitlyn Alexander) asks him to use they/them pronouns, his daughter's propensity to take on evil, immortal, supernatural beings is what he at first fails to understand. Eventually, he even comes to understand her fight.

Weiss argues that the cinematic lesbian vampire narrative is formulaic: the vampire appears and disrupts the natural (read: patriarchal) order; she engages in acts of vampirism for entertainment and sexual titillation during the middle section of the film; until she is destroyed

²⁶ Weiss, *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film*, 90.

and the natural order is restored.²⁷ An additional generic convention is the bisexual triangle of desire: a man is aligned with the forces of good, the vampire with the forces of evil, and the woman whose fate dangles in the middle is usually nice, sweet, and receptive to both.²⁸ The *Carmilla* series deviates from this narrative formula in several ways. Firstly, alignment with the values of good and evil do not take place along gendered lines - in fact, the labels of good and evil are in themselves murky. The character of Carmilla is a clear example of this claim. While she has participated in her mother's sacrificing of young girls to an ancient fish god, she has also attempted to save several of these girls. She expressed terrible anger after her sister Mattie's death in season two—threatening to kill anyone who crossed her path—and then separated herself from Laura and her friends to prevent from hurting them.

The bisexual triangle of desire ensures the lesbian vampire's destruction. By ensuring the death of the lesbian vampire, men alleviate their fear of lesbian love being a viable alternative; for it is horrific for them to believe that two women could prefer each other over a man.²⁹ For the *Carmilla* series, lesbian love is not an alternative model but the main model - the only love triangle in season one is between Carmilla, Laura, and Danny, Laura's English Teaching Assistant. Furthermore, Laura and Carmilla get their happy ending despite being almost murdered in every episode.

In tracing the relationship between the lesbian vampire and blood, Barbara Creed argues that the lesbian vampire is a menstrual monster.³⁰ Besides being monstrous because of their sexuality, lesbian vampires are further abject because of their ability to make a woman's blood flow. Blood coursing out of a woman brings to mind images of menstruation, which is considered impure within a number of a religious and cultural discourses. The scene of the

²⁷ Weiss *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film*, 91, 92.

²⁸ Weiss, *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film*, 92.

²⁹ Bonnie Zimmerman, "Daughters of Darkness: Lesbian Vampires," *Jump Cut* 24-25 (1981) 23.

³⁰ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, 235.

lesbian vampire biting her victim is doubly abject because a woman, already abject, releases the blood of another woman, an abject act. Feminist psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva argues that the blood of a woman is more abject than the blood of a man because it reinforces sexual difference and reminds the man of the woman's ability to procreate, which leaves the man with a sense of growing anxiety.³¹ Therefore, the vampire myth may be used to explain the passage to menstruation.

While the *Carmilla* series does not engage with the relationship between the lesbian vampire and menstruation in such detail, U by Kotex (the series' main producer) does capitalise on this association.



Figure 1: Vampires get their periods

In keeping with their menstrual hygiene brand, U by Kotex sponsored a video featuring Carmilla and Laura answering the age-old question: Do vampires get their periods? The answer is yes. According to this video, Carmilla has had 4000 periods and is a fan of the modern pad. She claims that human periods and vampire periods are pretty similar, barring the fact that vampires replenish the lost blood by drinking blood. Creed actually makes note about a popular European belief in the sixteenth century—that of a woman becoming a vampire to replace the blood she lost during menstruation.³² The video also includes interesting period facts like how World War I nurses started to use the bandages used for wounded soldiers during their

³¹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 96.

³² Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, 238.

menstruation period because it absorbed more blood. I read this transmedial video as a wink toward the tradition of linking the female vampire with menstruation while also attempting to normalise the act of menstruation by encouraging conversations about periods. The video also serves as an advertisement for U by Kotex.

The ruthlessness of Carmilla's mother reinforces certain patriarchal structures that inform the Male Gothic. While the lesbian vampire may be redeemed in the *Carmilla* series, the mother figure remains monstrous. The Dean is not Carmilla's mother by blood, but she is the one who raised Carmilla after she was turned into a vampire. Carmilla's biological parents are never mentioned. The Dean seems to be the only maternal presence in Carmilla's life, evidenced by Carmilla referring to The Dean as *maman* (mum in French). According to Julia Kristeva, the mother-child relationship is rife with conflict, with the child struggling to break free and the mother reluctant to release control.³³ An inability to let go of her child is characteristic of the "archaic mother," who operates in a context in which the father is absent.³⁴ This struggle is clearly reflected in the interactions between The Dean and Carmilla. The Dean wants her favourite child to stop questioning her plans, and Carmilla does not want to be her mother's pawn anymore. The Dean is also an embodiment of psychoanalytic scholar Roger Dadoun's idea of the "archaic maternal figure," a figure that he describes as existing beyond all good and evil, a figure that is totalizing and does not have a knowable form. The audience is never privy to how the Dean looks, we only know her through her voice or interact with her when she possesses one of the characters. Even when Carmilla gets into a fight with her mother in "Mommy Dearest" (S1, E 32), she does so after The Dean takes over Laura's body. Furthermore, the Dean is an example of excess in a mother. The Dean is an ambitious woman, the head of the board of Silas University, an ancient goddess, and a woman grieving the loss

³³ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 13.

³⁴ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, 64.

of a lover. All her actions – sacrificing a group of young girls, attempting to kill Laura and her friends, opening the gates of hell – are justified by her mourning of a dead lover; as a result, her character also gestures toward anxieties surrounding women who feel too much. Just as the archaic mother terrifies the patriarchy due to her powers of creation, so The Dean is terrifying due to her ambition and excess.

Film scholar David Baker argues that the vampire should not be understood as a product of a static psychic fear but as a personification of their age.³⁵ Therefore, the relevance of the lesbian vampire today is connected to what stories she tells about our society. Despite reshaping the discourse on lesbian vampires somewhat, *Carmilla* does fall into the trap of the lesbian vampire whose supposed indiscretions are forgiven because of her ability to fit into the normative. The 1970s saw the rise of a very specific lesbian vampire, one that is well-mannered and polite, upper-class, and physically attractive.³⁶ She is therefore not fully an outsider, but rather both an insider and an outsider, passing as a member of “civilised” society. *Carmilla* is a similar lesbian vampire—born a countess but now a messy, lethargic, but still attractive teenage vampire, who has enough money to travel the world several times over. It is almost easier to accept her role in her mother’s evil plans because of her whiteness, attractiveness, and class status. The audience feels sympathetic toward her inability to control her situation. The same sympathy is not extended to Mattie, a character of colour, as I will discuss in chapter three. In fact, Mattie is killed for an act she did not even commit, whereas *Carmilla*’s previous acts of violence are forgiven and her heroism highlighted.

³⁵ David Baker, “Seduced and Abandoned: Lesbian Vampires on Screen 1968-74,” *Erotic Screen and Sound: Culture, Media and Desire* 26, no. 4 (2012): 554.

³⁶ Baker, “Seduced and Abandoned,” 557.

1.4 *Carmilla* and Contemporary Vampiric Media

At the heart of the *Carmilla* series is a rag-tag group of friends who take on vampires, vampire slayers, ancient gods, and other supernatural creatures. One major influence on *Carmilla* is the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* TV series. The head writer of *Carmilla*, Jordan Hall, proclaimed at the first CarmillaCon that she was obsessed with *Buffy* as a graduate student and that *Carmilla* was her opportunity to create her own vampire-related media.³⁷ Important parallels between *Buffy* and *Carmilla* include: a brooding vampire with a good heart (*Carmilla* = Angel), a central character dedicated to sniffing out trouble and extinguishing it (Laura = Buffy), love triangles that involve the brooding vampire, and a “big evil” that must be defeated.

The tonality of the two shows are also very similar—almost every review of the *Carmilla* series, fan and professional, comment on the campness of both. Dana Piccoli on AfterEllen wrote “If you loved *Buffy* and *Supernatural*, you’ll love *Carmilla*.”³⁸ Kathryn Diaz on BitchFlicks, a website dedicated to reviewing films and television series through a feminist lens, claims “[...] the new setting and plot that *Carmilla* adapts in its transformation nestles it in the same company as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.”³⁹ *Buffy* and *Carmilla* both incorporate snarky humour in their dialogue to prevent the content from becoming too melodramatic. For example, in *Buffy*, Buffy’s mother refers to Buffy’s inner tussle between Star and Angel by asking which ornament should be placed at the top of the Christmas tree and, in *Carmilla*, Laura uses sock puppets to tell *Carmilla*’s story of heartbreak and betrayal. Some members of the *Carmilla* fandom refer to Laura and her friends as the Scooby-gang, a reference from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (as well as, obviously, the animated TV series *Scooby-Doo* (1969-present)).

³⁷ “Creators Panel” 00:20:07.

³⁸ Dana Piccoli, “8 Reasons Why You Should Watch ‘Carmilla’ Now!” *AfterEllen*, October 8, 2014, <https://www.afterellen.com/video/228802-8-reasons-why-you-should-watch-carmilla-now>.

³⁹ Kathryn Diaz, “Moving Us Forward: ‘Carmilla’ the Series,” *BitchFlicks*, December 12, 2014, <http://www.btchflicks.com/2014/12/moving-us-forwards-carmilla-the-series.html#.XnzzktNKhQI>.

There is even a Tumblr page dedicated to *Buffy* and *Carmilla* crossover memes.⁴⁰ These crossover memes usually have images from the *Carmilla* series with superimposed text from *Buffy*.

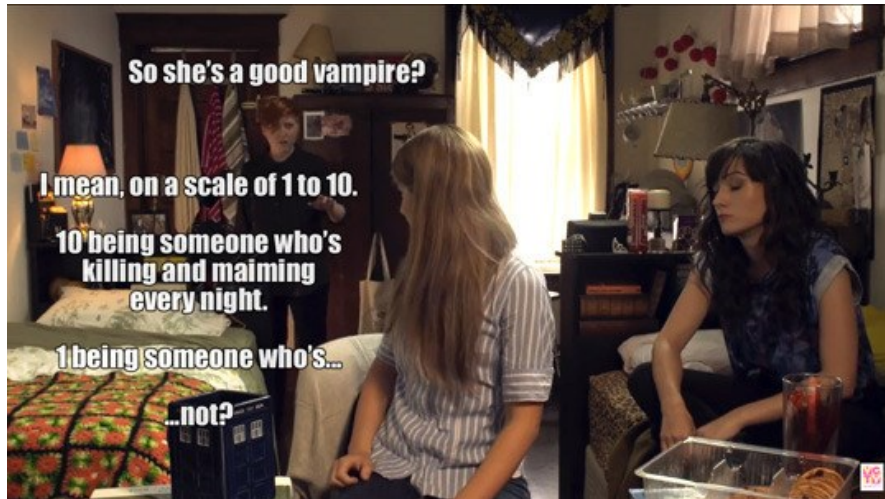


Figure 2: A *Buffy*/*Carmilla* Crossover

In the meme above, the image is from season one of *Carmilla*, whereas the dialogue is from a *Buffy* episode in which Buffy's best friend Willow confronts Buffy about being in love with Angel. LaFontaine in *Carmilla* and Willow in *Buffy* have similar reactions to their friend being romantically inclined towards a vampire. In fact, LaFontaine is the first of the lot to realise that Laura and Carmilla have a crush on each other; they also find Carmilla equal parts scary and cool. Additionally, pop culture sites like *Buzzfeed* and *The Mary Sue* have recommended the *Carmilla* series to *Buffy* fans.⁴¹

In an article titled "The Feminists Making Vampires Gay Again" published in *The Daily Beast*, an American news and opinion website that focuses on politics and pop culture,

⁴⁰ @Carmilla: The Series Reviewed, "Carmilla X Buffy the Vampire Slayer 5/∞," Tumblr, May 2, 2015, <https://carmilla-reviewed.tumblr.com/tagged/carmilla-x-btvs>.

⁴¹ Candice Darden, "20 Reasons "Carmilla" Is The Best Show You're Not Watching," *BuzzFeed*, June 22, 2015, <https://www.themarysue.com/how-dear-you-are-to-me-ranking-carmillas-10-most-adorable-moments/>.

⁴¹ Logan Dalton, "How Dear You Are to Me: Ranking *Carmilla*'s 10 Most Adorable Moments," *The Mary Sue*, September 15, 2016, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/candicedarden/reasons-why-carmilla-is-underrated>.

entertainment reporter Amy Zimmerman writes: “For too long now, vampirism has been presented as the exclusive domain of pale men and their fawning female victims.”⁴² This statement speaks to a recent trend, a trend that effaces the long presence of the lesbian vampire in cinema. The *Twilight* series is probably the most popular vampire story of the 2010s. The books turned movies follow the relationship between a brooding vampire, Edward Cullen, and an insecure human turned powerful vampire, Bella Swan. *Carmilla* capitalises on the popularity of the *Twilight* series, as the first season of *Carmilla* was released in 2014, two years after the final film of the *Twilight* series. The *Carmilla* series references the films through dialogue in a scene where Carmilla is tied to chair with ropes of garlic, watching films on Laura’s laptop, and then exclaims “Ugh! Vampires don’t cry! This is almost as bad as that sparkly twerp!” (“Strategic Planning” S1, Ep 21). The *Carmilla* series also signals the *Twilight* series indirectly in that it is a love story between a human and a vampire, but queerer. *Carmilla* challenges the dominant heterosexuality of both *Buffy* and the *Twilight* series by building on queer vampiric and Gothic narratives.

In telling the story of a charming but lonely and bitter lesbian vampire, the *Carmilla* series borrows from its lesbian vampire ancestors and its supernatural contemporaries and attempts to change certain formulas that stereotyped the lesbian as monstrous. *Carmilla* shows how the connection between queerness and monstrosity can be severed by centering queer and non-binary identities and freely expressing queer love. What is scary in the *Carmilla* series is not the characters’ sexuality or gender identity, but the imminent end of the world whose catalyst is the monstrous mother, The Dean. I argue that the transformational space occupied by the *Carmilla* series is similar to the one inhabited by fan works, which also toe the line

⁴² Amy Zimmerman, “The Feminist Making Vampires Gay Again,” *The Daily Beast*, October 10, 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-feminists-making-vampires-gay-again>.

between being true to the source text and changing it to reflect the fan's own experiences and desires.

1.5 *Carmilla* as Fanfiction

Media scholar Aymar Jean Christian argues that the independent web series takes from both fandom practices and industrial practices. Just as fans reimagine certain narrative structures from popular media, producers of the independent web series do the same. However, fan works and the independent web series are usually discussed through the two different lenses: fan works are usually discussed in relation to a fan's rights over a media object and how fan work can be categorized as a type of labour, whereas the independent web series is seen as an extension of the media industry. They also offer up a more flexible means of production as compared to TV shows by major media conglomerates, which allows for more diverse kinds of representation.⁴³ While the *Carmilla* series was produced by a number of industrial players such as Smokebomb Entertainment, the digital division of Shaftesbury, the company that produced *Murdoch Mysteries* (2008-present), and is sponsored by well-known menstrual hygiene brand, U by Kotex, the series nonetheless has its roots in fan cultures. Producer Stephanie Ouaknine, who was working at Shaftesbury, found *Carmilla*'s story editor, Ellen Simpson, through fanfiction. Ouaknine enjoyed Simpson's *Warehouse 13* fanfiction and reached out to her, proposing that she join *Carmilla*'s crew.⁴⁴ I propose that the *Carmilla* series shares certain characteristics with fanfiction.

Writers of internet fanfiction engage with the urtext with the aim of expanding the universe, elaborating on it, combining various works into a singular narrative, and developing

⁴³ Aymar Jean Christian, "Fandom as Industrial Response," 1.6.

⁴⁴ "Creators Panel" 00:51:00.

varied connections between characters and plot points.⁴⁵ Henry Jenkins argues that a fan work is usually saturated with personal experiences, emotions, and identities.⁴⁶ The *Carmilla* series does something very similar with Le Fanu's novella. The novella focuses on the rise and fall of the vampire, Countess Carmilla Karnstein, and her erotic relationship with Laura, one of her victims. The web series expands the narrative to include Carmilla's brother, William (Aaron Chartland); J.P. Armitage, a boy who got sucked into the library catalogue; Laura's friends, such as Danny Lawrence (Sharon Belle) and Wilson Kirsch (Matt O'Connor); and several other side characters. Furthermore, while the novella's only supernatural aspect is the presence of vampires and vampire slayers, the *Carmilla* series also includes ancient Mesopotamian gods, ghosts, and witches. Characters such as Mattie, whose only presence in the novella was to reinforce the monstrous nature of the vampire, have full-fledged personalities, backstories, and roles in the series. *Carmilla* also brings several types of media into conversation, such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, *The Vampire Lovers*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The bringing together of different works is characteristic of crossover fanfiction. Crossover fic authors usually orchestrate the collision of two or more fictional worlds to create another world that is coherent and unique unto itself. The *Carmilla* series is a different kind of crossover fic, one that makes thematic references to other media, instead of directly incorporating characters, plot points, or contexts from other narratives.

The *Carmilla* series could also be considered a kind of alternative universe (AU) fanfic of the novella by Le Fanu. According to fan studies scholar Natalia Samutina, AU consists of almost any distortion of the canonical universe and extreme changes in characters are usually

⁴⁵ Kerri L. Mathew and Devon Christopher Adams, "I Love Your Book, but I Love My Version More: Fanfiction in the English Language Arts Classroom," *The Alan Review* (2009): 36.

⁴⁶ Henry Jenkins, "Get a Life!: Fans, Poachers, Nerds," in *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 2007), xiv.

referred to as out of character or OOC.⁴⁷ For example, Laura Hollis from the series is OOC. In the novella, Laura is depicted as naive, passive, and unable to exert any agency on the narrative; whereas in the *Carmilla* series, Laura is the driving force behind the plot. AU's are catalysts for fanfiction writers to realise an infinite number of imaginary scenarios, develop or completely change certain characters, and create different versions of fictional worlds. The *Carmilla* series takes advantage of its ability to mould the novella's already existing universe to a different time (the twenty-first century), place (a university), and with a broader cast of characters who are diverse in terms of both gender and sexuality. The alternativeness of a fic varies from slight shifts in related events, often made with the desire to save a character from a terrible fate, to completely changing the whole picture of the world.⁴⁸ I argue that the *Carmilla* series does a bit of both. Jordan Hall and Ellen Simpson, the writers of the *Carmilla* series, also claim that the events of the novella end mid-season one.⁴⁹ The web series adapts the story in order to redeem the lesbian vampire and nullify her monstrosity.

Fanfiction tends to be character driven. Samutina argues that it is a practice driven by an interest in people—their psychology, their differences, the decisions and choices they make, and the realities they may live through.⁵⁰ Fan studies scholar Mary Ellen Curtin claims that fanfiction is akin to speculative fiction about characters rather than the worlds.⁵¹ Speculative fiction is a genre that asks “what if?” The *Carmilla* series asks a similar question of its characters: What if Le Fanu's Laura refused to be a passive recipient of the ideas expressed by those around her? What if Carmilla was not the villain of the story? Fans are also interested in

⁴⁷ Natalia Samutina, “Fan fiction as World-Building: Transformative Reception in Crossover Writing,” *Journal of Media and Culture Studies* 30, no. 4 (2016): 438.

⁴⁸ Samutina, “Fan fiction as World-Building,” 438.

⁴⁹ “Creators Panel” 00:40:02.

⁵⁰ Samutina, “Fan fiction as World-Building,” 448.

⁵¹ Francesca Coppa, “Introduction: Five Things That Fanfiction Is, and, One Thing It Isn't,” in *The Fanfiction Reader: Folk Tales from the Digital Age* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 12.

transformations of class identity⁵²: What if Laura grew up middle class instead of rich? These questions are integral to understanding relationships, events, and experiences that make a character who they are. By posing these questions, the creators of the *Carmilla* series build a fictional universe that upsets the connections between femininity and passivity, as well as between lesbianism and monstrosity. Furthermore, the creators incorporate ideas of student resistance by having the narrative play out in a university with an evil administration.

The *Carmilla* series is like a fan work because it was made by queer creators who were fans of other vampire media and because it inverts the structures that organise Gothic narratives and its open challenge to the stereotype of the lesbian vampire, particularly the lesbian vampire of the 1970s. This type of transformative work allows creators and the audience alike to saturate a fictional world with socio-cultural discourses that are of personal importance to them.⁵³

1.6 Conclusion

Through this chapter I hope to have contextualized *Carmilla* by situating the series in the histories of Gothic literature and lesbian vampires on screen. Additionally, I have proposed that the *Carmilla* series challenges these genres in the way that fanfiction does. For example, changing the Victorian setting to the contemporary world frees the characters from certain restrictions, enabling a relationship between Carmilla and Laura that is not exploitative, while still gesturing toward the Gothic through Carmilla's past as a countess and of course the lesbian vampire. I attribute the desire to transform Carmilla's narrative to the lived experiences of the primarily queer creators of *Carmilla*. The series' status as a queer fan product attracts other queer fans, particularly lesbian fans. These lesbian fans meet each other online and at conventions, bond over a variety of shared interests, and create communities of feeling.

⁵² Coppa, "Introduction: Five Things That Fanfiction Is, and, One Thing It Isn't," 13.

⁵³ Samutina, "Fan fiction as World-Building," 442.

Chapter 2: Bitten by Feelings - The Online *Carmilla* Fandom as a Lesbian Community of Feeling

2.1 Introduction

Greetings Gentle Viewers! Just as Laura Hollis, a first-year journalism student at Silas University, invites you into her life as part of the affective landscape of the web series, *Carmilla*, I would like to invite you into a part of my life. I discovered *Carmilla* as a young lesbian doing her undergraduate degree in a small liberal arts university in Pune, India. At the time I was rapidly consuming content by lesbian vloggers in a desperate attempt to convince myself that I was not alone in the struggle of accepting my sexuality. YouTube's algorithm suggested that I watch *Carmilla*. Giving the series a chance definitely eased my emotional burden. I cried, laughed, yelled at my computer screen in frustration, and felt my insides turn to mush while watching a group of misfits take on Mesopotamian Gods, rituals to open the gates of hell, and a university administration apathetic to their needs.

Carmilla and Laura's relationship, which shifted from hostility to love, was one I had dreamed of having since I was a teenager. I became so deeply involved with the show that between the first season (August-December 2014) and second season (June-October 2015), I read all the fanfiction I could and scoured Tumblr for hours, just to relive certain moments, read fan theories on how the second season could progress, and reblog fan art related to the series. While being an active part of the *Carmilla* fandom, I could not help but wonder what drew me and other fans of the series to have such intense feelings about these characters and their stories. The chance to explore the answers to the question I posed then has come now; through this chapter, I attempt to establish the online *Carmilla* fandom as a digital affect culture that invites the exchange of both positive and negative affects and leads to the creation of a lesbian community of feeling.

JP Armitage, junior records clerk and Silas University student class of 1874, is one manner in which *Carmilla* introduces the idea of affect travelling through digital space. His digital consciousness is rescued from the library by Laura and her friend LaFontaine in “Required Reading” (S1, E27). JP is funny, quick-witted, and polite. He and LaFontaine even begin to date toward the end of season one. Thus, the content of the web series gestures toward the transgressive relationships formed by fans, on the basis of feeling, over the internet.

Much of the online *Carmilla* fandom can be found on YouTube, Tumblr and AO3. YouTube is the host of the series. Season one of *Carmilla* has approximately three and a half million views, season two has approximately two million views and season three has approximately a million views. Each episode has around two to three thousand comments. On Tumblr, the #Carmilla tag is vast, diverse, and still, five years after the show’s end, sees a handful of new posts every day. When the series was still running, the tag saw a few hundred new posts every day. That number plateaued for a while and then spiked again when the movie was released in 2017. On AO3, there are currently 6,104 in-progress or completed fanfics set within the *Carmilla* universe or featuring characters from the web series.⁵⁴ In comparison, the popular television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has 28,924 fanfics, which indicates not only the fact that *Buffy* has been around for a longer period but also that the *Carmilla* fandom is a niche one in the world of vampires. Even within the genre of lesbian fanfic, *Carmilla* takes up a relatively small space. For example, Clarke and Lexa from *The 100* (2014-present)—a post-apocalyptic CW television show about a group of young adults landing back on earth after having lived their entire lives in a spaceship orbiting the earth—have 10,970 fics written about them versus Carmilla and Laura’s (aka Hollstein’s) 4,998.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ As of March 19, 2019.

⁵⁵ As of March 19, 2020.

However, *Carmilla* fans continue to be intensely dedicated to the series, evidenced by the recent watch parties held by KindaTV. Starting on Valentine's Day of 2020 with the first season, fans of *Carmilla* came together on KindaTV's channel to watch and discuss the series. The sustained power of the *Carmilla* fandom is exemplified in the very first CarmillaCon which took place in Toronto on October 5 and 6, 2019. The Con was the product of a group of *Carmilla* fans coming together and deciding to host a convention solely dedicated to "the little web series that could"—a phrase often used by *Carmilla* fans to describe the series. The convention did not receive endorsement from any of the companies that produced with the web series: Smokebomb Entertainment, Shaftesbury, or U by Kotex.

Drawing on the work of media and gender studies scholars such as Alexander Cho, Katrin Döveling, Anu A. Harju, Denise Sommer, and Ann Cvetkovich, I argue that for *Carmilla* fans, YouTube, Tumblr and AO3 enable the creation of digital affect cultures, affinity spaces, and archives of lesbian feeling. I use the term affect as defined by psychoanalytic theorist Teresa Brennan. According to Brennan, affects are emotions, which have an energetic dimension to them, in the sense that they can both enhance and/or deplete.⁵⁶ Positive affects such as belonging enhance, while negative affects such as anxiety and anger deplete. Brennan argues that identities are formed based on a process called "othering."⁵⁷ This process involves unloading negative affects on subjugated groups such as women and people of color. In chapter three, I will explore how "othering" occurs in the *Carmilla* fandom through the interactions between fans of the character Danny Lawrence (Sharon Belle) and her detractors. Digital affect cultures are communities that come into being through mediated rituals and commemoration practices that evoke a sense of belonging through emotional identification with others.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Teresa Brennan, "Introduction," in *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 3.

⁵⁷ Teresa Brennan, "Introduction," in *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 12.

⁵⁸ Döveling, Harji and Sommer, "From Mediatized Emotion to Digital Affect Cultures," 6.

New media scholar Alexander Cho's description of Tumblr as an affinity space can help us understand interactions between those in the *Carmilla* fandom on YouTube, Tumblr and AO3. Affinity spaces are social spaces, usually online, in which people bond over shared interests. Multiple people with multiple affinities or interests may gravitate toward similar types of posts on Tumblr, videos on YouTube, and fanfiction on AO3, thereby creating online spaces that encourage a sense of belonging on the basis of shared interests.

Carmilla online fan culture can also be understood as an archive of lesbian feeling—particularly AO3. According to lesbian scholar Ann Cvetkovich, queer performance is central to the creation of lesbian publics because it brings bodies together. I interpret femslash fanfiction—and *Carmilla* fanfiction in particular—as a contemporary example of queer performance that creates communities through the process of being written, read, and discussed. While the term “femslash” covers all erotic relationships between women regardless of their sexual identities, I will be using the term in relation to fanfiction about canonical lesbian relationships, as in the case of *Carmilla*. Queer performance is central to the creation of an archive of lesbian feelings because it takes the taboo subject of romantic and sexual love between two women outside of the bedroom and makes it accessible and therefore documentable. AO3's femslash fanfiction can be understood as an archive of lesbian feelings because it makes the love between women available to memory. Moreover, YouTube could also be considered an archive of lesbian feelings by providing a screening platform for the *Carmilla* series, which is another kind of performance of queerness.

In this chapter I will explore the positive affects traded within the online *Carmilla* fandom in order to show that they play an integral part in the formation of online lesbian communities of feeling. I will explore positive affects such as belonging, nostalgia, and happiness as they travel through the major platforms of YouTube, Archive of Our Own, and Tumblr. I begin with YouTube because that is the website where one can find all three seasons

of *Carmilla* and because of the way in which the show has been filmed i.e. almost completely in vlog format, a format popularized by YouTube. I will then analyze the fandom's activities on AO3 and Tumblr. In the conclusion of this chapter I will bring together *Carmilla* on YouTube, AO3, and Tumblr to show how each of them embodies a digital affect culture, which makes it possible to claim that the online *Carmilla* fandom is a community of feeling.

2.2 *Carmilla* on YouTube

I argue that *Carmilla*'s vlog-like episodes hosted on YouTube enable its comments section to act as an affinity space in which fans of the series partake in a give-and-take of affect, not only with each other but also with the characters. Furthermore, I argue that in certain circumstances YouTube in itself acts as an archive of lesbian feelings. The coming together of affinity spaces and archives of lesbian feeling on YouTube then makes it possible to understand *Carmilla* on YouTube as a digital affect culture and community of feeling.

By uploading vlog-like episodes on YouTube, *Carmilla* situates its characters and viewers within the affective economy of YouTube. Fan and media scholar Louisa Stein argues that in this affective economy, success is determined by participation, interaction, and the sharing of supposedly 'authentic' emotion.⁵⁹ Vlog is a term that combines the words video and blog. These types of videos often directly address the viewer. The format involves the subject sitting in front of a video camera that most often captures their upper body. Sound is often recorded either through the computer or a cell phone. More often than not the vlog is filmed in a domestic space such as a bedroom, dorm room, or living room and so the audience is given a glimpse into the subject's personality not only through what they say and how they choose to say it, but also through their decorative choices.

⁵⁹ Louisa Ellen Stein, *Millennial Fandom: Television Audiences in the Transmedia Age*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015), 161.

In the first season of *Carmilla*, Laura's vlogs are filmed primarily in her and Carmilla's dorm room. Their differing personalities are clearly reflected in Laura's light-colored bed sheets and yellow pillow versus Carmilla's leopard-print bedding. The first indication of Carmilla's growing attachment to Laura is that she keeps stealing Laura's yellow pillow, which looks out of place on her dark bedding. This contrast of light and dark is how many of the side characters in the first season view the women's growing friendship and then romantic relationship, with Laura being bright, bubbly, and idealistic and Carmilla being dark, brooding, and a creature of the night.

Film scholar Laura Horak argues that vlogs by trans youth generate powerful impressions of authenticity and intimacy through certain formal qualities: close framing, a private setting, direct address, and an amateurish style. Furthermore, she claims that these qualities make the subject come across as real and their statements true.⁶⁰ The character Laura is similarly framed in *Carmilla*: she faces the camera directly while sitting in her dorm room, thereby creating a sense of intimacy with the viewer, encouraging the audience to earnestly listen to all that she says. Within the world of the series, Laura records these vlogs as part of a journalism project, and often refers to the audience watching the *Carmilla* series as belonging to the audience that is watching her journalism project unfold. Therefore, when watching the series, we are hailed as Silas University students, which serves to heighten the impression that we are watching a real-world vlog rather than a scripted web series. For example, in "Nancy Drew" (S1, E9), Laura expresses gratification at having so many viewers. She says: "I can barely believe this...I mean when I put the videos up, I thought there might be a few of you out there who had seen the weird (referring to the supernatural events on the Silas University campus) and wanted to help...But the fact that there are so many of you, I mean...I'm

⁶⁰ Laura Horak, "Trans on YouTube: Intimacy, Visibility, Temporality," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (2014): 575.

overwhelmed.” When she says “you”, she is evidently referring to her viewers within the world of the show, which slips into the viewers of the show.

Additionally, *Carmilla* uses an amateurish aesthetic wherein the image is sometimes grainy and the sound sometimes echoes as if captured by the computer’s speaker. Almost every *Carmilla* episode begins with Laura looking into the camera and greeting the viewer, mimicking the conventions of popular YouTube vlogs or a face-to-face conversation that could occur over a video chat website such as Skype. Laura’s monologues are clearly scripted, but her display of unabashed emotion when talking about her nightmares, heartbreak, and frustrations while looking directly into a camera, and as a result directly at the audience, invites the viewer to form a relationship with her and her friends.

Laura’s expression of excess emotion falls under the category of the melodramatic as conceptualized by feminist film scholar Linda Williams.⁶¹ According to Williams, melodrama features bodies that are caught in intense sensation or emotion, such as the portrayal of weeping.⁶² In “Compulsory Violence” (S2, E22), Laura and Carmilla sit close to the camera while Laura sobs at Carmilla’s confession that she could never be what Laura wanted. When Carmilla, in a moment of vulnerability, asks if Laura misses her, Laura responds in a soft and hoarse voice: “Like someone cut a hole in me.” Williams observes that the act of sobbing is both visually and aurally coded through uncontrollable body spasms and cries of anguish. She claims that listening and watching to bodily excesses encourages the body of the viewer to react in a similar manner.⁶³ As a result, the melodrama incites the audience to weep in sympathy. While Laura weeps, we feel it viscerally because our bodies are caught up in mimicking the sensation or the emotion of the body on screen. The intensity of our reaction is

⁶¹ Linda Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess,” *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1991): 3.

⁶² Williams, “Film Bodies,” 4.

⁶³ Williams, “Film Bodies,” 4.

further heightened because of the vlog format of the series – Laura seems to look directly at us as she unloads her feelings.

The romance and problems first between Laura and Danny and then between Laura and Carmilla also feed into a “culture of feels.” Louisa Stein defines a culture of feels as communities of millennial fans who acknowledge emotions as the driving force behind their creative authorship.⁶⁴ Laura encourages viewers to express themselves by performing a series of complex, seemingly uncensored mix of emotions, including self-doubt and fear. What’s more, viewers who have formed a bond with the characters go on to YouTube to give them advice in the comments section, perhaps because the vlog format is associated with real people who read the comments section of their videos and may incorporate some of their viewers’ advice into their daily lives. One commenter attempts to give Laura a wakeup call, while supporting Carmilla’s decision to break-up with Laura in the comments section for “No Heroics” (S2, E15). They write:

The moment somebody tells you “if you really loved me you would...” is that moment you should scoot on out of there. Nobody should tell you how to love them; you show your love and affection how you want to, and if they try to tell you how to do that, it’s emotional manipulation and that’s got no place in a healthy relationship. You go, carmilla!⁶⁵

This commentator is scolding Laura and supporting Carmilla as if they are real people and not fictional characters. When I first read this comment, I remember thinking maybe Laura will stumble across it and get a reality check. The heartbreak and shock that expressed by fans during the separation of Carmilla and Laura, two fictional characters, matched the intensity of the heartbreak and shock expressed over the separation of Liza Koshy and David Dobrik, two

⁶⁴ Stein, *Millennial Fandom: Television Audiences in the Transmedia Age*, 156.

⁶⁵ Sumithri Venketasubramanian. Comment on “No Heroics (Carmilla S2 E15)”. KindaTV, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vHhZBW2lto>.

real YouTubers, in 2018. Koshy and Dobrik had filmed many a vlog together and in the comments section of Dobrik's vlog, his viewers plead with him to create a video claiming their whole break-up was a prank.⁶⁶ Similarly, in the comments section of "No Heroics," several viewers write that they refuse to acknowledge that Laura and Carmilla broke up. Thus, *Carmilla's* vlog-like episodes encourage its viewers to form strong affective relationships with its characters.

In her discussion of archives of lesbian feeling, Cvetkovich describes documentary films and videos as extension of the traditional archive because of the ways in which the visual format collates and makes visible documents that otherwise may have remained obscure. She goes onto claim that they use a primarily visual archive of popular culture in order to create archives of feeling.⁶⁷ I argue that YouTube does something similar through thumbnails. Thumbnails are small still images from videos that aid in their recognition. The thumbnails that show up on one's YouTube homepage are related to videos one is currently watching or has previously watched.

My YouTube homepage is an archive of my lesbian feelings, reflected by the assortment of tiny images on the screen. As a fervent consumer of lesbian and queer vlogs, all one can see on my homepage are images of women kissing each other, hugging each other, or staring at the camera teary-eyed while possibly recounting their coming-out stories.

⁶⁶ David Dobrik, "we broke up," YouTube video, 6:19, posted June 5, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2HytHu5VBI&t=15s>.

⁶⁷ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, 181.

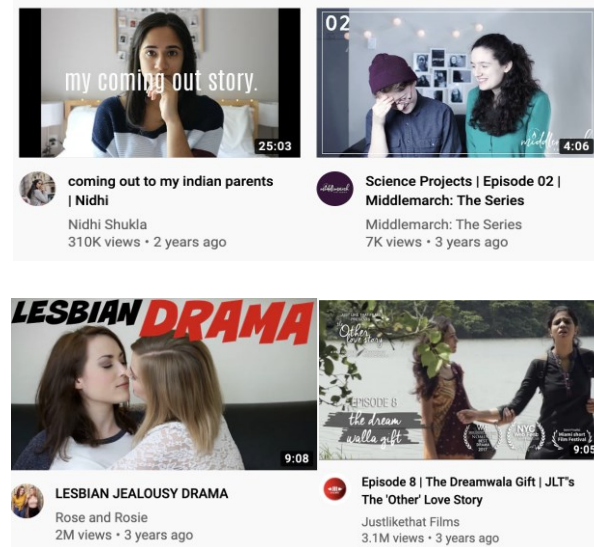


Figure 3: Screenshot of my YouTube recommendations (Taken on 27 March, 2020)

Furthermore, the recommended section on YouTube is a conglomerate of thumbnails of videos I may otherwise not have found. YouTube is an archive of lesbian feelings not only because it hosts a range of lesbian content, including *Carmilla*, and its structure which allows us to search for videos we may want to watch, but also because of the way in which it displays such content—through thumbnails that act as visual reference points to the subject matter being dealt with in the video.

I discovered *Carmilla* through YouTube’s suggestion algorithm because I had subscribed to at least five lesbian vloggers over a period of six months. The thumbnail of *Carmilla* that I clicked on was of a distressed looking Laura sitting in a dorm room and at the time I was a distressed undergraduate student procrastinating in the library. Looking at her slightly tousled hair, her panicked expression, and her messy dorm room reminded me of myself, the junk food strewn across my own dorm room, and the strum of anxiety I was feeling due to a number of upcoming deadlines. As a result, just looking at that still image of Laura, I felt a sense of “Oh! I’m not alone.” My decision to participate in Laura’s life stemmed from a shared experience of university life, which involved juggling about a thousand problems at

once. Other fans may have found themselves watching *Carmilla* for other reasons, because the series spoke to them in some way.

By speaking to people with varied lived experiences, *Carmilla* creates an affinity space which is most visible in its comments section. An affinity space is an online space in which people align over shared interests. As mentioned previously, the series' vlog format invites the viewer to comment on one or multiple episodes. Commenters not only bond over their shared interests in *Carmilla*, but also other media being consumed such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The L Word* (2004-2009), *Xena: Warrior Princess*, and *Adventure Time* (2010-2018). One comment, with thirteen likes, says "If you ship Bubblegum and Marceline from Adventure time...I'm pretty sure that you are going to like this. :3."⁶⁸ Some commenters mention how other real vloggers, such as MilesChronicles, a trans YouTuber from Los Angeles, mentioned loving this series and that is why they decided to watch it. All of these references reflect a shared interest in queer media. They also introduce fans of *Carmilla* who may have relatively less exposure to queer content to a variety of existing queer media.

Carmilla on YouTube is a digital affect culture because the series brings affectively resonant people together over a specific theme—complex queer representation. Every character in the series is multi-faceted and none of the queerness is written solely for consumption by a heterosexual audience. In fact, at CarmillaCon, a fellow fan told me that she believes most straight people would not even be able to understand the series. The comments section on YouTube reveal two of the most important characteristics of a digital affect culture: alignment and belonging. Alignment occurs when similar individuals join together in an imagined community i.e. the sharing of a similar interest in queer media which is reflected in both discussions about *Carmilla*, but also in the mentioning of various other television shows

⁶⁸ Anna Baked. Comment on "Disorientation (Carmilla S1 E1)". KindaTV, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4QzRfvkJZ4&list=PLbvYWjKFvS5rX2yv-k5AJ8oxPoZ9zHcpe>.

that have queer themes and queer vloggers who have endorsed the series. A sense of belonging is produced by affective bonds and collective imaginations.

2.3 Femslash Fanfiction, Belonging, and Affinity on Archive of Our Own

In this section I aim to establish AO3 as an affinity space through its very structure, and femslash fanfiction on AO3 as an archive of lesbian feeling and repository of affect. AO3 is an online archive for fanworks, wherein anyone can sign up for free and post fan videos (fanvids), fanfiction, fan art, and other types of fan productions. Fan scholar Henry Jenkins describes fanworks as a process of reading and interpretation through which fans fragment texts and reassemble the shards according to their own experiences and needs, salvaging bits and pieces of material to make sense of their own lives.⁶⁹ AO3 has been created and is run by fans, and according to their mission statement is dedicated to preserving the history of fanworks and fan culture.⁷⁰ AO3's popularity is due in large part to its non-commercial and fannish nature. Aca-fan Olivia Riley argues that many elements of the structure of AO3, from its search engine to its header format, allow fans to attribute meaning to fanfiction outside of the main text.⁷¹

Riley claims that tags, pairings, and warnings on a fic give the reader an idea of what to expect and a basic understanding of the content, which increases the pleasure one derives from the story. Many Carmilla fics have been tagged with phrases like “ugh! I’m such a lesbian” or “Oops I’m gay.” These particular tags gesture toward a story’s outpouring of lesbian and gay feelings in the form of cliched romances and physical intimacy. These tags not

⁶⁹ Olivia Riley, *Archive of Our Own and the Gift Culture of Fanfiction*, MA Thesis, University of Minnesota (2015): 27.

⁷⁰ Riley, *Archive of Our Own and the Gift Culture of Fanfiction*, 27.

⁷¹ Riley, *Archive of Our Own and the Gift Culture of Fanfiction*, 36. I draw on Olivia Riley’s undergraduate thesis on AO3 in this chapter. While it has not gone through the rigorous review that a published academic article or PhD dissertation would have, she has done the most extensive analysis of AO3’s structure and how it encourages a sense of community amongst fans that I have come across.

only indicate the number of lesbians that flock to the web series, they also encourage lesbian fans of *Carmilla* and other series to read and comment on the fic. The larger community can add meaning to an author's work through the comments section. Fans discuss future ideas for fanfic and elements of the story they liked or disliked. The author can also interact with readers, talking about their inspiration behind and feelings about the fic.

An encouragement of fan interaction is built into the very structure of AO3 because the meaning of fanworks resides as much in the social ties created by the exchange of narratives, the sharing of gossip, and the play with identity, as it does with the words on the page. Fan interaction forms the basis of the concept of an affinity space. AO3 is an affinity space in which fans of the *Carmilla* series align with one another on the basis of a shared endeavour i.e. writing, reading, and commenting on fanfiction. In the image below one can see a connection forming between multiple queer women through an exchange of positive affect over an in-progress alternate universe *Carmilla* fic in which Carmilla is Laura's favorite author and a chance meeting leads to an intense romance.

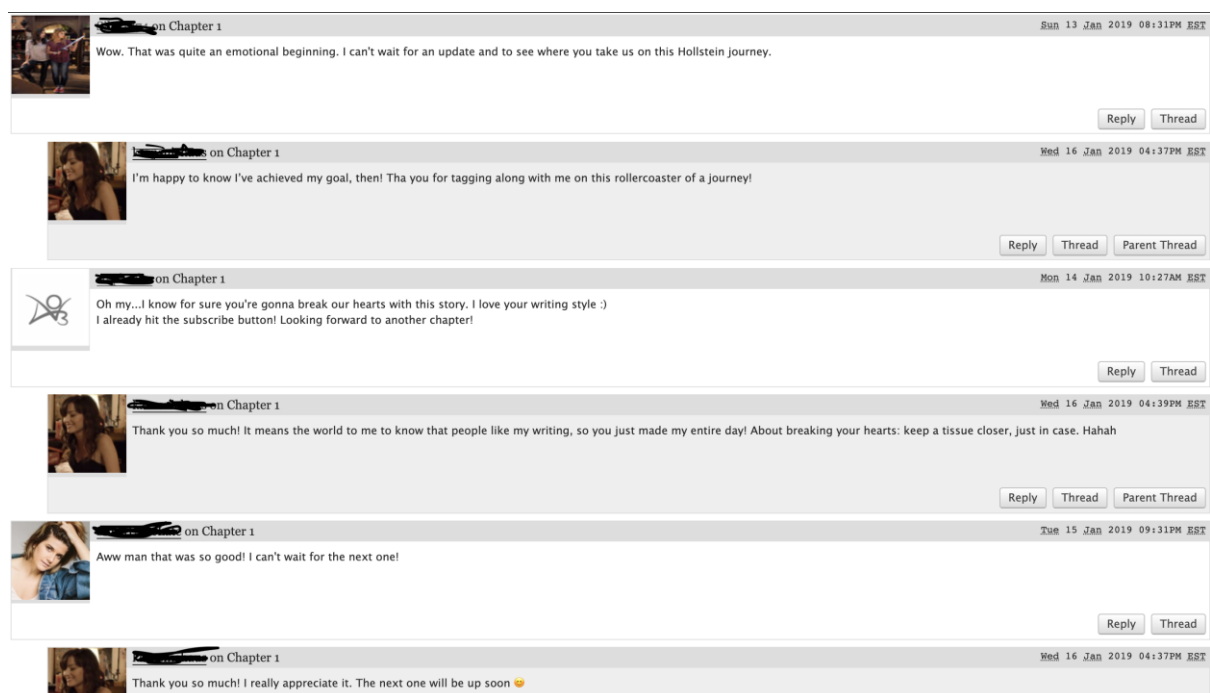


Figure 4: Exchanging Positive Affect

As the commenters share their opinions, all of them praising the first chapter, the author feels encouraged to update the fanfiction at a steady pace. The writer's and commenters' affective investment in the series and its fandom is reflected in the images they have chosen for their avatars: a photo of Elise Bauman, who plays Laura Hollis; a photo of Carmilla; and one featuring both Laura and Carmilla. Someone from within the fandom will be able to instantly recognize that the image of Carmilla is from season one, while the image of Laura and Carmilla is from season three.

These images also reflect the characters that the commenters and writer prioritize: the author is clearly a fan of Carmilla's character, while the commenter with an image of Elise Bauman as their avatar may feel particularly connected to her real-life persona and the commenter with both Laura and Carmilla as their avatar is likely a "Hollstein" shipper.⁷² The reflection of affective investment through avatars and an exchange of positive affects via the comments section on a fanfic gesture toward a digital affect culture coming into being, an online space where affective flows construct an atmosphere of belonging through affective resonance and alignment. The writer and commenters have created a sense of belonging by validating each other's opinions and interpretations of the series and by choosing *Carmilla*-related avatars as an indication of their investment in the series.

I also argue that femslash on AO3 functions as a digital lesbian archive of feelings. According to Cvetkovich, lesbian public cultures take sexuality outside of the bedroom and make private conversations about sadomasochism, the butch-femme binary, dildos, and more the focus of collective conversations.⁷³ Femslash fanfiction represents sexual and romantic relationships between women and is at the centre of lesbian fandom practices. In the tags on *Carmilla* fanfic, *#smut* is a very popular genre. In fanfiction, stories labeled *#smut* usually

⁷² Shippers are fans who actively support a particular romantic relationship, or "ship."

⁷³ Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, 15.

involve a heavy sexual encounter among two or more people. More often than not the comments on smutty fanfiction involve readers disclosing the ways in which they achieved a certain level of sexual satisfaction through the fic. For example, on an alternative universe fanfiction titled “A Gardener, and a student,” in which Carmilla works as a gardener for Laura’s family, a reader has commented “I think everyone is going to need a cold shower after that!!! Feel free to write as much of this as a you like :).”⁷⁴ The response elicited in the reader through this fic is once again reminiscent of Williams’ argument that representing certain kinds of intense feelings, in this case sexual pleasure, prompts the body of the viewer (or in this case reader) to respond in ways that mimic the feelings being depicted. Through their encouragement of the writer and declaring their need for a cold shower, this commentator is spurring conversation about lesbian sexual encounters.

“Angst with a happy ending” is another genre of fanfiction that is popular within the *Carmilla* fandom – about fifteen percent of *Carmilla* fanfiction on AO3 has the tag *#angst with a happy ending*. *#Angst with a happy ending* usually gives fanfiction authors room to explore the elements in a relationship that causes characters to clash. For example, in “Still Falling For You,” standardusername emphasizes how Carmilla’s penchant for running away from her problems and Laura’s need to constantly be in control eventually leads to the demise of their relationship. After meeting each other a few years later at a friend’s child’s christening, they find themselves reliving everything that went wrong in their relationship, which prompts them to get back together after acknowledging that they both need to change. While they confront moments of heartbreak, us readers hurt with them as well. A comment on the second chapter of “Still Falling For You” states: “Pfff that hurt. In both good and bad ways. Your writing is so amazing...you truly make me experience every emotion they do. It's so agonizing and I

⁷⁴ mightywiz. Comment on “The Gardener, and a student”. MysteriousAnonymous, 27 Sept 2016, 11:32 a.m., <https://archiveofourown.org/works/8146859/chapters/18671003>.

can't wait to read more.”⁷⁵ Here too an exchange of affect is taking place, wherein the reader is reacting positively to the author's ability to make them feel the character's feelings. In my opinion, being made to feel agonized can be cathartic. Angsty fanfiction that ends well is popular amongst readers because it gives us the chance to delve into well-detailed backstories and empathize with the characters while knowing that everyone will be happy in the end.

Moreover, such fics also make visible the complex entanglements shared by women in romantic or erstwhile romantic relationships with one another. As a result, one of the lenses through which I read *Carmilla*'s femslash fanfiction on AO3 as an archive of lesbian feelings is through its depictions of lesbian sexuality in the online public space. It is possible to map Cvetkovich's archive of lesbian feelings onto online space because she makes no mention that a public only refers to those congregated in physical spaces. In her discussion of what constitutes lesbian public cultures she refers to sexual acts, queer transnational publics, incest, AIDS and AIDS activism, butch-femme discourse, and grassroots archives. Online public spaces allows similar kinds of activism and the creation of archives, and it also affords those doing the activism and creating the archives a certain degree of anonymity. I argue that this affordance of anonymity is what differentiates the kinds of lesbian publics that femslash fanfiction forms from the kinds of lesbian publics discussed by Cvetkovich. The promise of anonymity online gives those not of out the closet the confidence to participate in lesbian public cultures as well.

Cvetkovich goes on to define such lesbian public cultures, in which I have included the category of femslash fandom, as counterpublics built around sex, feelings, and trauma. Femslash fandom is also built around trauma because it may be a way of expressing one's sexuality without coming out in one's offline life, which indicates a fear of not being accepted

⁷⁵ SpicyTaco. Comment on “Still Falling For You”. standardusername, 19 Feb 2019, 6:14 p.m., https://archiveofourown.org/works/17330351/chapters/42126311?view_adult=true.

and having to possibly face rejection by both friends and family. Additionally, looking for connections and validation online suggests that one may not be receiving enough affirmation in their offline life. Loneliness or feeling out of place in the spaces you inhabit is a kind of trauma. *Carmilla*'s femslash fandom on AO3 can best be described, to paraphrase Cvetkovich, as a form of affective, erotic, and personal living that is public in the sense that it is accessible, available to memory, and sustained through the collective activity between fanfic author and reader.⁷⁶

Cvetkovich emphasizes queer performance's ability to create publics by bringing bodies together in a particular space. Femslash fanfiction is also a performative space that brings bodies together online; one in which authors are given the opportunity to explore not only the potentialities of a fictional universe but also of their own bodies and identities. An example of this is the presence of *Carmilla* "character with reader" fics, which involve depicting the reader of the fanfic (referred to as "you" in the fic) as being in a relationship and/or friendship with a character from *Carmilla*. This format allows the author and reader to situate themselves in a different universe, in the shoes of either Carmilla or Laura, and explore what it would be like to be in a relationship with their favorite lesbian vampire or tiny gay journalist (Laura). InsanityAtBest is an author on AO3 who only writes *Carmilla* character with reader fics and has a Tumblr blog wherein a *Carmilla* fan can submit their specific fantasy, which InsanityAtBest will then write and post on AO3. In keeping with Cvetkovich's idea of queer performance and its relationship to the building of counterpublics, I consider femslash fanfiction as a lesbian public built around feelings because it brings people together not only through the act of writing, but also through the fannish gift economy and discussions that may occur via the comments section on fanfic. And so, my final claim of this section is that femslash

⁷⁶ Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, 18.

fanfiction, as cultural texts, are repositories of affect. These affects are not only encoded in the content of the text itself but also in the practices that surround their production and reception.

2.4 Click Reblog on Tumblr

For *Carmilla* fans, Tumblr acts as both an affinity space and a participatory culture. The act of reblogging intensifies affect across the site. In this section, I closely analyse a Tumblr blog dedicated to *Carmilla* as an example of how the creation of a blog dedicated solely to the series indicates the creator's affective entanglement with *Carmilla*. To support my argument that *Carmilla* on Tumblr is an affinity space that encourages people with varied interests to interact, I also analyse two completely different blogs whose only similarity is that the admins of both are fans of the series. In the conclusion, I discuss how the *Carmilla* fandom benefits from Tumblr's affective online space.

Tumblr is another space that encourages the expression of fannish behaviors; however, it does so more through images instead of text. Alexander Cho describes Tumblr as “image aggregation on steroids.”⁷⁷ Tumblr pages are collections of posts that give the appearance of grand chaos because there is little to no text and users reblog through a simple hyperlink to the originator's page. This means that no matter how many times a post is reblogged, the original poster will always be credited as the source, with their name appearing at the bottom of the post. A Tumblr user can then click on the name and be directed to the original poster's blog. Cho describes the reblogging of images and text posts that have no relationship with one another on Tumblr as “multiple affinities and their associated affects speaking at a thousand miles a minute.”⁷⁸ Queer Tumblr users circulate porn, flirt, and provide information on how to

⁷⁷ Alexander Cho, “Queer Reverb: Tumble, Affect, Time,” in *Networked Affect*, ed. Ken Hills, Susanna Paasonen, and Michael Pitt, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015), 60.

⁷⁸ Cho, “Queer Reverb,” 61.

deal with homophobia and coming out to a conservative family. We also disseminate important news relating to LGBTQ+ communities across the world, organize real-life meet-ups, reblog and/or heart pictures of each other and people they we find important or attractive. We also use Tumblr to share opinions and/or fanworks about various fandoms and may edit the theme of our blogs to reflect our individuality. For example, one Tumblr blog dedicated to *Carmilla* is organized around Carmilla's colors, which are red and black—black because that is the character's favorite color and red because blood is her source of nutrition.

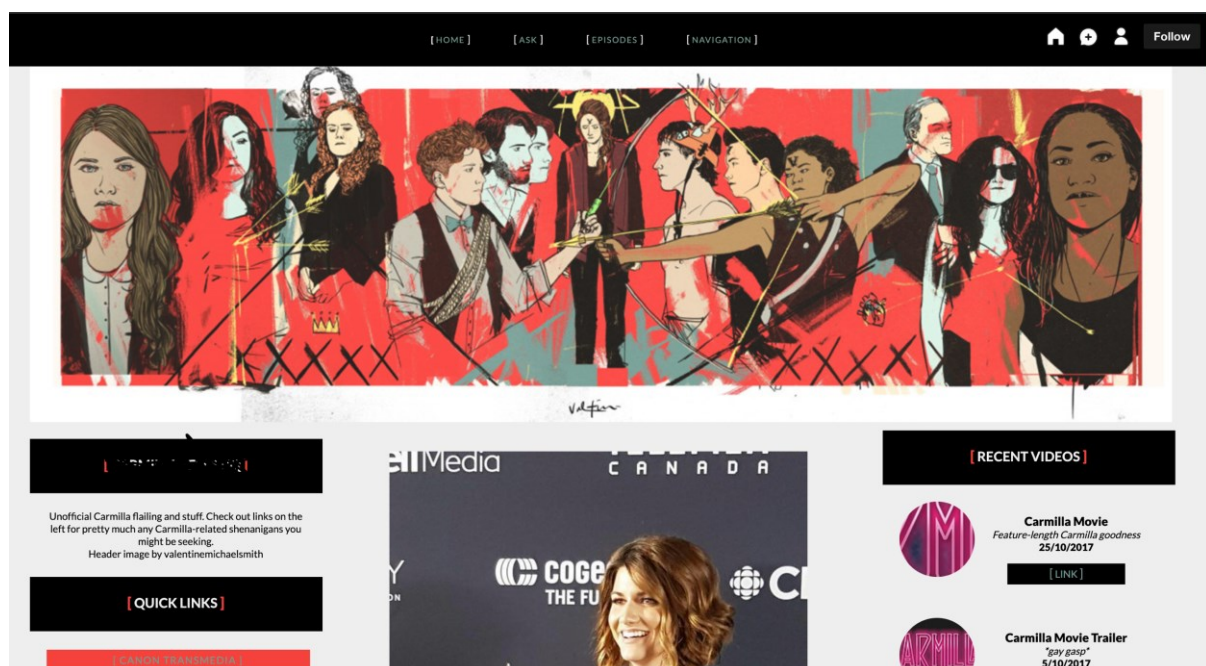


Figure 5: Screenshot of Tumblr blog

The header image is fan art made by @valentinemichaelsmith, who is credited in the bio of the blog, and is based on season two of the series. It is possible that the fan who made the page got this image because they already know the artist, since *Carmilla* is a relatively small fandom, or they may have gotten in touch with the artist via their various social media and asked for permission to use the image as the header for their blog. Another possibility is that the admin may have stumbled across the fan art on another blogger's Tumblr and used it as their header image. This piece of art is different from other *Carmilla* fan art I have come across in that it is the artist's interpretation of the second season and not a reproduction of

certain frames from the series, and it features all of season two's characters instead of just Laura and Carmilla, who are present in romantic situations in a majority of *Carmilla* fan art. The picture is saturated with red because season two is possibly *Carmilla's* most violent season, with all of these characters coming face to face with their mortality at some point. It is interesting to note that there are smatterings of red on all the characters that have been responsible for someone's death. The Baron is a vampire slayer, Laura was responsible for Mattie's death, and Perry (Annie M. Briggs), who, while possessed by The Dean, incites multiple acts of violence.

On top of the header are four hyperlinks in green font within white brackets. The EPISODES hyperlink leads to KindaTV's YouTube page of the *Carmilla* series. Therefore, if someone scrolling through Tumblr were to stumble upon this blog and find the header or the content being reblogged interesting, they could very easily find the series. The NAVIGATION hyperlink leads to a list of other hyperlinks, through which a fan may find the episodes, the social media accounts of the characters (possibly run by the writers of the show and the cast), *Carmilla's* official merchandise store managed by Smokebomb Entertainment, a list of characters in the Carmillaverse, interviews with the cast and crew, fanfiction, playlists of songs from the series, transcripts of the episodes, a fan mailing address, and a map of *Carmilla* fans located across the world. I propose that this Tumblr blog functions as a kind of museum of *Carmilla* content—an online space that holds a collection of objects that are of importance to the *Carmilla* fandom. As a museum it provides not only links to the series and the film, but also to a plethora of fanwork. The admin also reblogs content related to *Carmilla*. This blog is therefore an example of one of the ways in which a fan expresses their intense attachment to a media object: through a meticulous documentation of official and unofficial *Carmilla*-related content.

In keeping with the blog's museum-like nature, beneath the header and on the right of the page is a section titled RECENT VIDEOS. In this section is a link to *The Carmilla Movie* (Spencer Maybee, 2017), a trailer for the film, a teaser trailer for *Carmilla* season three, bloopers from *Carmilla* season two, and the *Carmilla* cast speed dating bonus video. Beneath the header on the left is a small bio that reads "Unofficial Carmilla flailing and stuff. Check out links on the left for pretty much any Carmilla-related shenanigans you might be seeking. Header image by valentinemichaelsmith." Beneath the bio is a section of quick links leading to the social media of the characters and the cast and crew, a list of the cast along with the characters they play, and other links. There are also links to the admin's Instagram and Twitter accounts.

The way the blog is structured, along with the bio, suggests that the blog is attempting to be a place where any old or new *Carmilla* fan may find all the material they need in relation to the series. Additionally, the choice of colours, the choice of the header, providing links for all official and bonus content related to the series as well as the cast, and the making of a global creampuff map indicate the admin's intense affective relationship with the web series, which makes the hard work put into creating an intricate blog like this worth it. While this particular Tumblr blog is highly structured, Tumblr's grand chaos is apparent in the platform's main news feed. This news feed contains original and reblogged posts by the user and the blogs they follow. In contrast, an individual blog such as this one can be structured in a manner that is easy to navigate for a user accessing that particular blog.

Tumblr is host to a participatory culture dedicated to the creation of community artifacts. This emphasis on participation makes the #Carmilla tag on Tumblr an affinity space. Cho defines affinity as something that resists structured language or a semiotic formula, but which is influenced by lived bodily experience, the ebb and flow of intensity, and powerful

attunements of desire and need.⁷⁹ Two contrasting Tumblr blogs demonstrate how people with very different personalities can be pulled together through the *#Carmilla* tag into a shared affinity space. For the purposes of anonymity, I have coded the two Tumblr blogs I will be doing a comparative analysis of as “vampire” and “buttercup.” Both are examples of Tumblr blogs as affinity spaces and affinity as being informed by lived experience. The admin of vampire has a goth aesthetic and self-identifies as a Slytherin – one of the student houses in the Harry Potter series, which I read as a code for dark and ambitious. In keeping with her self-proclaimed identity as a lesbian, she shares a lot of lesbian and other queer content, but she also reblogs memes about hating everything, black cats, and having depressive episodes. Her blog is an expression of a conglomerate of things that she associates with her personality.

The admin of buttercup comes off as the exact opposite. She describes herself as a 20-year-old, “fully-fledged lesbian from Australia.” Originally broody, she attributes her relatively new happiness to a partner that brought colour into her life. Buttercup has many interests, including books, music, shows (including *Carmilla*), and video games. Her “queen” is Taylor Swift. Reflecting her bubble-gum lesbian aesthetic are posts about cute cats, women she considers her icons, and the heart eyes she has for her significant other. While their differing personalities make them gravitate toward different blog aesthetics and other kinds of media, their interests converge in the *Carmilla* series, which is simultaneously dark and heavy and also about a successful love story between two women. It is these varied experiences and consequently varied affinities that contribute to the non-linearity, incoherence, and impermanence of encounters on Tumblr.

The intensity of affect builds on Tumblr through user practices of repetition - reblogging the same image at different points in time. For example, one particular meme about how fans feel about the cliff-hangers at the end of *Carmilla* episodes has been reblogged at least 154

⁷⁹ Cho, “Queer Reverb,” 79.

times by a variety of fans over approximately one year. The meme involves a heart being at a normal pace while resting, beating slightly faster while exercising, and finally beating fast enough to come out of one's chest after watching a cliff-hanger at the end of an episode of *Carmilla*.



Figure 6: Beating Heart Meme

The continuous reblogging of this meme is an indication of how fans of *Carmilla* may share certain feelings of anxiety when confronted with an episode of *Carmilla* which ends in a cliff-hanger; and it is also a constant reminder of how one may feel while watching said cliff-hanger. I know that every time I stumble cross this meme, I feel the same dread I felt at the end of the first season when Laura claims that Carmilla is dead.

Even the decision to reblog an image is submerged in affect that is based on affinity. Tumblr users often reblog posts that resonate with them – a post about *Carmilla* fans storming into Shaftesbury, the company that produced the series, to demand more *Carmilla* content has been reblogged at total of 350 times, indicating a shared desire by many in the *Carmilla* fandom to see a sequel to *The Carmilla Movie* be made. As a result, positive affects are able to travel through Tumblr because of its encouragement of reblogging content that speaks to varied

experiences and consequently interests. The *Carmilla* fandom benefits from this encouragement because it gives *Carmilla* fans the opportunity to express their intense engagement with the series by reblogging multiple posts related to the series.

2.5 Conclusion

Laura Hollis's vlogs encourage *Carmilla*'s viewers to feel like they too are part of the world of the series. With every supernatural mystery that Laura and her friends attempt to solve, fans of the series attempt to help them via the YouTube comments. In this give and take of affect, wherein Laura shares her life with her viewers and in turn viewers share their own experiences and opinions, a relationship between the characters and the audience is formed. This relationship fosters a sense of belonging between *Carmilla* fans, which prompts them to produce fan works such as fanfiction, fan art, and fan videos. In the consumption of a media object, the production of fan works, and subsequently the consumption of fan works on YouTube, AO3, and Tumblr, positive affects are shared amongst *Carmilla* fans. Furthermore, a sense of belonging is fostered on AO3 through the centering of lesbian experiences that have been left out of popular culture and encouraging the expression of one's affective investment in the series through the very act of writing, reading, and commenting on *Carmilla* fanfic. On Tumblr, this sense of belonging is created through the reblogging of memes, GIFs, and text posts that reflect one's intense engagement with the *Carmilla* series. The presence of a sense of belonging within the online *Carmilla* fandom then makes it possible to understand this fandom as a digital affect culture; and at the center of digital affect cultures are people who come together over bonds of sentiment.

Chapter 3: *Carmilla* in the World - Globality and Race in the *Carmilla* Fandom

3.1 Introduction

In an interview with CBC, Natasha Negovanlis, the actress who plays Carmilla, says: “Because it is a digital series, it reaches a larger audience. It reaches countries where being queer is sometimes illegal or not spoken about. So Carmilla provided this safe haven and online community” (vanKampen).⁸⁰ There is some truth to her statement – I discovered *Carmilla* and the *Carmilla* fandom when it was illegal to be queer in India and the series made me feel seen, particularly after my family expressed intense discomfort with my sexuality.⁸¹ However, I want to complicate the idea of the online *Carmilla* fandom as a utopian, inclusive, safe haven. Toward this end I will be engaging with the scholarship of fan studies scholar Mel Stanfill. Stanfill argues that while the internet does make it possible for global fandoms to exist, the default idea of the fan continues to be centered around whiteness. Stanfill even interviewed a Brazilian nonbinary neuro-divergent fan of *Carmilla* who claimed that while *Carmilla* helped them realize they were nonbinary, being part of the fandom as a person of colour was a bad experience.⁸² This chapter will explore both the globality of the *Carmilla* fandom and how racism is expressed within the fandom.

This chapter is divided into two parts. First, I will explore where in the world *Carmilla* fans can be found and, second, I will investigate the racial dynamics of the series itself and within its online fandom. The first section will begin with an engagement with my own

⁸⁰ Stephanie vanKampen, “How a little Canadian web series about a lesbian vampire became a worldwide hit,” *CBC*, October 24, 2017, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/entertainment/carmilla-web-series-movie-1.4367622>.

⁸¹ Under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code all unnatural sexual acts, including oral sex, was deemed illegal. While the law did not specifically mention queer identities, it was and continues to be used to harass visibly queer individuals.

⁸² Mel Stanfill, “Fans of Color in Femslash,” 2.5.

experience as a *Carmilla* fan, as a fresh out of the closet teenage lesbian from India. It will then delve into how the subtitling of the series gestures toward a fandom that exists across the world, including places in which being queer is illegal. The section will end with an analysis of a global “creampuff” map made by a fan of the series. The second section grapples with the dominance of white characters in the first season, the introduction of a central Black character in the second season and the way she is killed, and the treatment of both characters of colour and fans of colour within the *Carmilla* fandom. The *Carmilla* fandom’s treatment of both characters of color and fans of color shows how minority groups are made to carry the burden of the majority’s negative affects, as claimed by Brennan. In the conclusion I will discuss the concept of global fandom, its creation on the basis of emotion, and its inclusions and exclusions based on race.

3.2 Where in the world are *Carmilla* fans?

As a distinctly urban Indian audience demands better non-heteronormative representation, they often look toward Netflix, YouTube, and Amazon Prime and thereby might stumble upon web series such as *Carmilla*. After posting about my thesis on my Instagram story, I had many interactions with friends and acquaintances who love the show and have actively participated in the fandom.



Figure 7: My interaction with a fellow Indian *Carmilla* fan

I went to university with the person in the image above. She too is queer and from our interaction it is clear that she had an intense engagement with the series. In fact, the many positive responses I received for my thesis were from people that attended university with me; several of whom identify as LGBTQ+. These responses seem to indicate that there are quite a few Indian *Carmilla* fans from a particular section of society – upper class and from large cosmopolitan cities. *Carmilla* also has a dedicated fan base in South America, reflected in the multiple Instagram accounts dedicated to the web series from Brazil, Argentina, and other countries. According to KCP Loft, a publishing company that entered into a partnership with Shaftesbury to transform the web series into a young adult novel, *Carmilla* has been viewed in 193 countries (Anderson), in other words almost every country in the world. The global nature of the *Carmilla* fandom becomes apparent on YouTube. I was admittedly stunned when I saw the number of languages the web series has been subtitled in – Arabic, Chinese (Simplified and Traditional), Croatian, Czech, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, French (Canada), German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Latvian, Polish, Portuguese (Brazil), Portuguese (Portugal), Romanian, Russian, Slovak, Spanish, Swedish, Thai, Turkish, and Vietnamese. This section traces the globalness of the *Carmilla* fandom through its community of subtitlers and an analysis of a map created by a fellow fan of *Carmilla* documenting fans of the series across the world.

A majority of the subtitling work has been done by fans of the series. For example, the Italian subtitles were made by a professional subtitler, translator, and fan of *Carmilla* from Italy. She can be found on Twitter under the handle of @_sintie. The subtitles in Turkish were made by a fan of the series living in Istanbul. The translators and subtitlers of *Carmilla* call themselves the “Creampuff Language Nerds” and got involved with the series by responding to an open call put out by the producer of the series, Steph Ouaknine, for translators on her

Tumblr.⁸³ As a result, it is possible that the absence of languages from South Asia, such as Hindi or Urdu, may be because fans from these regions were not aware of this call for translators. The presence of global network of translators clearly indicates the existence of an active *Carmilla* fandom beyond the English-speaking world.

Another indication of a global *Carmilla* fandom is a Google map created by a *Carmilla* fan titled “Creampuff World Domination”.⁸⁴ As a reminder, “creampuff” is what *Carmilla* fans call themselves, after Carmilla’s nickname for Laura. While the title of the map implies that creampuffs are taking over the globe, the map itself shows that creampuff domination is more prevalent in North and South America and Europe. Associated with each star on the map is a name of some sort, either a social media username or a pseudonym, and the country and city location of that person. Since the stars overlap with each other, the creator of the map has provided a bar on the right side of the map, not featured in the image below.

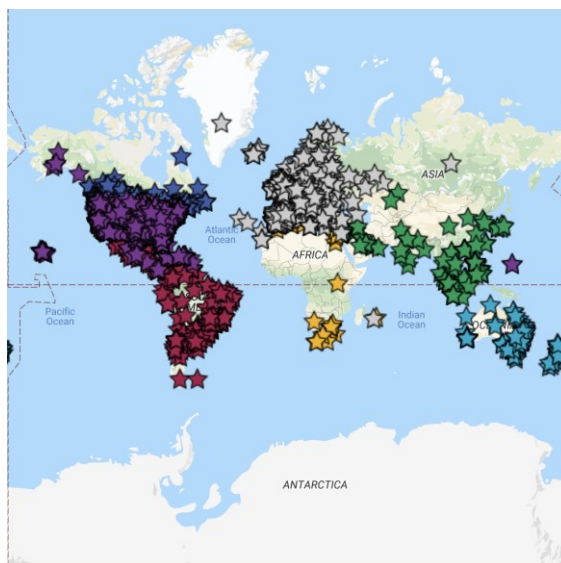


Figure 8: Global Creampuff Domination

⁸³ @HotLadyPants, “If you’d like to help with subtitles...,” Tumblr, January 7, 2015, <https://hotladypants.tumblr.com/post/107457242622/creampuffs-from-everywhere>.

⁸⁴ @CarmillaFeelsHQ. *Creampuff World Domination*. 6 Sept 2016, <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1s0xOs7CwzmeDwucEANoFEAMUHLA&ll=-3.81666561775622e-14%2C0&z=1>.

The bar lists the seven continents of the world plus the country of Canada: Asia, Australia/New Zealand, Africa, Europe, Central and South America, Canada, and North America. The creator has likely chosen to include Canada as a separate area because the series was made in Canada. Each part of the world has a drop-down option and when you click on the drop-down option, every username of every *Carmilla* fan in the region is provided. When you click on a particular name, the map zooms into their city and country. Just scrolling through the names under these places makes it apparent that the number of names under North America, Central and South America, Canada, and Europe is at least double that of the number under Asia, Africa, and Australia/New Zealand. This is obviously not an exhaustive list of fans because in order to feature on the map, one would have had to fill out a Google form linked from the creator's Twitter feed. If a *Carmilla* fan from somewhere in South Asia was not aware of such a project, like myself, they would not find themselves on the map; and so, the lack of density of fans in Asia, Africa, and Australia/New Zealand may be attributed in part to a lack of knowledge about this map.

Why is it that fans from these regions have not responded in the same way as fans from the Americas and Europe, either to Steph's call for translators or the map creator's call to be added to the map? I am still searching for an answer to this question. Despite the limitations of both the map and the subtitles, both suggest that the global nature of the *Carmilla* fandom is skewed toward the Americas and Europe. This skewing could mean that certain fans of the series who live in parts of the world that are not the Americas and Europe may not participate in practices that are central to fandom such as writing and reading fanfiction, making fan videos, having a Tumblr blog, or following fans of *Carmilla* on other social media. My friend in Figure 7, while a fan of the series, does not participate in the aforementioned fan practices. The question that then arises is to what extent must an individual engage with a media object to be considered as part of its fandom? Furthermore, *Carmilla* fans from the Americas and

Europe may be more visible because of the existence of fan collectives in these regions – members of these collectives, who have often met online, travel to various fan conventions together and may even get together to organize a fan convention, as in the case of CarmillaCon, as I will discuss in the next chapter.

3.3 Melanin Matters: Race and Whiteness in the *Carmilla* Fandom

Discussions of race are almost non-existent within the *Carmilla* fandom because most of the characters are white and that is considered normal by a majority of the fans of the series. I have loved *Carmilla* since the trailer for its first season aired. However, while watching the first season, two questions that crept up on me were: Why is the only character of color I see, Natalie (Lisa Truong), a psychology student kidnapped during a wine and cheese party as part of The Dean's plot? Why is it mostly a sea of just white? Even Natalie is only a secondary character. Scrolling through YouTube, Tumblr, and AO3, I was unable to find a single *Carmilla* fan that echoed my concerns, even though I am sure that some fans had the same feelings I did. I, too, did not say anything online about the absence of queer characters of colour on the show. As Stanfill writes, while the internet makes it possible for global fandoms to exist, the default assumption of fandom continues to be whiteness.⁸⁵ The anonymity of Tumblr and AO3 gives voice to those who feel left out of public discourse, but also reinforces the assumption that everyone who writes fanfiction or has a Tumblr blog looks a certain way and lives in a specific part of the world, unless mentioned in the user's bio. In this section, I will analyze how race is tackled across both *Carmilla* itself and its online fandom. Toward this end, I will be engaging with episodes from the series, comments made by the writers and producers

⁸⁵ Mel Stanfill, "Fandom's Normativity: Assuming and Recruiting the Socially Dominant Fan Subject," in *Exploiting Fandom: How the Media Industry Seeks to Manipulate Fans*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018), 24.

of the series during the Creator's Panel at CarmillaCon, comments on the episodes posted on YouTube, and Tumblr posts.

While most of the main characters in the series are white, there is one major black character in season two—Matska (aka Mattie) Belmonde (Sophia Walker). Mattie is Carmilla's sister in the sense that they were both raised by the same vampire mother, The Dean. Her origins can be traced back to the novella. Mademoiselle De Lafontaine, one of Laura's servants in the novella, sees Matska in the carriage with Carmilla and her mother. She describes her as "a hideous black woman, with a sort of colored turban on her head [...] nodding and grinning derisively towards the ladies, with gleaming eyes and large white eyeballs, and her teeth set as if in fury".⁸⁶ Her teeth are long and sharp, suggesting vampirism, and her eyes gleam as she grins at the young women around her. Her description in the novella is animal-like – she is a creature with little control over her base desires versus Carmilla who is a prim and proper countess of the night. As you can see in the image below, though, in the web series Mattie retains none of those characteristics besides the color of her skin. Jordan Hall, the white writer of the web series, says that she decided to introduce Mattie into the series because she saw an opportunity to make an intervention into a long history of white people's derogatory writing about people of color. On the Creators Panel at CarmillaCon, she said: "That moment when we found like that one little reference to Matska and I was like "Oh look! There's an actual character of color there, who is being treated horribly. How can we fix that?"⁸⁷ Hall continues: "Just because some old Irish guy writes terrible things about you, doesn't necessarily mean you have to accept his story".⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, *Carmilla*, (Toulon: Editions Soleil, 2014 Anniversary Edition), 12.

⁸⁷ "Creators Panel" 00:32:07.

⁸⁸ "Creators Panel" 00:32:18.



Figure 9: Matska Belmonde (Sophia Walker); Source: The Mary Sue

While all the main characters in season one are white, Mattie is introduced in “Something Wicked” (S2, E5) as one of three new characters of color. The other two characters of color are Mel (Nicole Stamp) and Theo (Shannon Kook). While Theo has only a minor role as a member of the Zeta Omega Mu fraternity, Mel is given a more complex backstory and plays a significant role in the narrative as one of the characters vying to be chair of the Summer Society. In season two, Mattie becomes the new chair of the board of Silas University and one of the season’s major antagonists. She fuels Carmilla’s vampiric nature and is apathetic to the lives of humans. While writing one of the only characters of color on the series as a villain could be read as racist, she is hardly one-dimensional. Carmilla and Mattie care deeply about each other. Throughout the series they are seen engaging in small acts of physical intimacy as an extension of teasing one another. By writing Mattie as someone Carmilla is attached to, the writers give the audience a reason to trust her. Her death in “Co-Existence” (S2, E30) is especially hard to watch because she does not die as a result of doing anything wrong. She is killed simply because a white character decides that she must die, encapsulating an extremely significant aspect of the black experience.

In “Godslayer” (S2, E29), Danny, Laura, and Baron Vordenberg (Ian D. Clark)—vampire slayer and member of the Silas University board—accuse Mattie of massacring the

students working at the Silas University newspaper and a group of Danny's sorority sisters. Mattie insists on her innocence by saying: "Do you have any idea how sick I am of being accused of murder sprees I didn't even get to commit?" Danny and Vordenberg scoff at her claim of innocence, which only serves to anger her. Mattie begins to walk slowly toward Vordenberg and starts to put her hands around his neck, saying: "You want to blame me for carnage. I will show you carnage." Danny stops her hand from reaching Baron Vordenberg and demands that Mattie give her an answer about her sorority sisters. Mattie catches onto Danny's hand, twisting her arm, and holds her in a grip so tight that the audience can hear the crunch of Danny's ribs. She warns Danny: "That temper of yours is gonna put you in a bind someday." However, Mattie does not make any move to take Danny's life. At that moment, Danny kills Mattie in what she considers to be self-defence by taking a magical necklace off of Mattie's neck and stomping on it. Laura had told Danny that this would kill Mattie, even though Carmilla only shared that information with Laura in confidence. And so, after Mattie's death, Carmilla issues a death threat to all the characters in the room, her jilted lover included.

I have only found two references in the fandom to Mattie being a black vampire. One is an article by Princess Weekes, the black queer assistant editor of *The Mary Sue*, titled "Matska Belmonde: The Dark Horse of Carmilla." Weekes writes: "The authors took a character who in the novella was a racist stereotype and turned her into one of the few well developed black female vampires that have ever existed in media. Period."⁸⁹ The second is on Tumblr, where a fan of the series expressed their desire to have a spin-off series with Mattie as the central character. This fan claims that they instantly fell in love with Mattie because she is a black woman dressed in dark clothing with a beatific smile. According to this fan, she deserves a spin-off because her character was let down by some of the writing in the show. I

⁸⁹ Princess Weekes, "Mattie Belmonde: The Dark Horse of *Carmilla*," *The Mary Sue*. October 23, 2017, <https://www.themarysue.com/mattie-belmonde-the-dark-horse-of-carmilla/>.

interpret these two reactions to Mattie as being in conversation with one another, with Weekes arguing that her character was treated well by the writers of the series, and the fan arguing that Mattie was not given her due by the writers. The latter reaction could be attributed to the way Mattie was killed by Danny, as I will discuss.

In the comments on “Co-Existence” (S2, E30), fans express visceral anger toward Laura and Danny, with fans wondering if Laura and Carmilla’s relationship could be salvageable after Laura betrayed Carmilla by telling Danny how to kill Mattie. However, the racial implications of Laura telling Danny how to kill Mattie are not explored by fans in the YouTube comments section. The outrage expressed in the comments section is more about Laura’s betrayal of Carmilla’s trust rather than how that betrayal led to the death of a character of color. For example, a fan writes “Laura...you’re breaking my heart. Like, do you even know why Carm told you that in confidence?”⁹⁰ Similarly, another fan exclaims: “Damn Laura, why would you tell Danny something like that?!”⁹¹

Furthermore, a majority of online commenters read Danny’s murderous reaction to Mattie’s tight grip as an act of self-defence. One commentator wrote: “But as someone else pointed out, Mattie was trying to well, KILL Danny. Danny was just acting out of self-defence...”⁹² In a similar vein, a Danny fan writes “She (Danny) was about to crippled at least and probably killed, and she acted in self-defence. No reasonable person could blame her for that, but it seems there are a lot of unreasonable people here.”⁹³ Similarly, a post on Tumblr tagged *#Danny Lawrence* begins with the Tumblr user claiming to be Danny’s lawyer. This

⁹⁰ The Most Curious Thing. Comment on “Co-Existence (Carmilla S2 E30)”. KindaTV, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsqJ8lwar3w>.

⁹¹ LovelyLies16. Comment on “Co-Existence (Carmilla S2 E30)”. KindaTV, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0D5ngRmdgAI>.

⁹² The DID System of A. Comment on “Co-Existence (Carmilla S2 E30)”. KindaTV, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0D5ngRmdgAI>.

⁹³ SDagoth. Comment on “Co-Existence (Carmilla S2 E30)”. KindaTV, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsqJ8lwar3w>.

desire to be Danny's lawyer seems to resonate with white cops on trial for police brutality against black people. They argue that while Danny is not blameless in the murder of Mattie, Mattie is far from innocent. They write: "Danny was actually saving herself, and protecting her friends. Danny may have accused Maddie unfairly, but did not attack Maddie. Maddie attacked her...I believe that Danny did the right thing. Mattie was dangerous, and was endangering Danny."⁹⁴ Similar to white supremacists who use the excuse of self-defence to justify violence against racialized groups, those who align themselves with Danny put forth a similar excuse to explain her treatment and subsequent murder of Mattie.

On the other hand, there are a handful of comments that may reflect some understanding of the racial politics of Danny's killing of Mattie. One of my favorite comments relating to Mattie's death states:

Danny, the same girl that previously kidnapped Mattie's sister, killed her mom, and put a lunatic in power. She falsely accused Mattie of murders, and then stopped her from exacting revenge on an actual monster. Yeah, I'd break her ribs too. But then Mattie didn't even plan on killing her. She just reacted to Danny manhandling her. So who're the real assholes here."⁹⁵

The commentator is calling out *Carmilla* fans who insist on labelling Danny's actions as self defense. I attribute the absence of conversation about the racial implications of a white character killing a black character in supposed self-defence to two possibilities: first, most of the commenters are white and are therefore ignorant of the systemic racism meted out against black and other people of color and, second, *Carmilla* fans of color may have chosen not to talk about the racial aspects of Mattie's killing in fear of facing vitriol from other fans.

⁹⁴ @hatterwithaheart, "Hello, I will be Danny Lawrence's lawyer today. This is my argument for Danny killing Maddie..." Tumblr, n.d., <https://hatterwithaheart.tumblr.com/>.

⁹⁵ Now deleted comment on "Co-Existence (Carmilla S2 E30)". KindaTV, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsqJ8lwar3w>.

Silencing oneself for fear of being trolled or harassed gestures toward how certain fans that advocate for Mattie may take on the unwanted affects (in this case anger) of Danny supporters. For example, on a comment on this episode stating “I genuinely dislike Laura! Carmilla deserves better...,”⁹⁶ another fan replied, “Carmilla let her violent, callous, bigoted vampire sister [Mattie] get near Laura and her human friends, until said sister nearly murdered one of them ... LAURA deserves so much better.”⁹⁷ While these kinds of emphatic replies are to a comment that makes no mention of race, one can only imagine the kind of replies a fan would receive if they mentioned the racial aspects of Mattie’s killing. Moreover, I read these replies as racist in themselves because they both uncritically characterize a black woman as monstrous. Nobody in the comments section calls them out on this racist discourse.

Danny’s complete lack of remorse after killing Mattie is in line with her consistent suspicion of difference, showcased from the beginning of the series in her negative reaction to Carmilla being a vampire in the first season. She assumes that everyone who is Other is dangerous and attempts to instill the same feelings in Laura but more often than not fails.

In the *Carmilla* online fandom, there are three main kinds of Danny fans: fans who dislike the Carmilla and Laura pairing, preferring to ship Laura and Danny; fans who are indifferent to character pairings but believe that Danny was let down by the writing of the series because of how she was phased out of the series after turning into a vampire and becoming one of The Dean’s minions; and fans who ship Carmilla and Laura but also love Danny.⁹⁸ These three groups combined make up a significant and vocal part of the *Carmilla* fandom. I argue

⁹⁶ Savannah Raaye. Comment on “Co-Existence (Carmilla S2 E30)”. KindaTV, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsqJ8lwar3w>.

⁹⁷ BlancheNeigefan. Comment on “Co-Existence (Carmilla S2 E30)”. KindaTV, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsqJ8lwar3w>.

⁹⁸ Shipping, a verb derived from the word relationship, is the desire expressed by certain fans to see two or more characters or people in a relationship with one another.

that their vociferous, uncritical championing of Danny can create a toxic environment for *Carmilla*'s fans of colour.

Some Danny fans have critiqued the series for becoming more Laura- and Carmilla-centric in the third season instead of focusing on other characters, particularly Danny. At the same time, some Danny fans (e.g. those that ship Danny and Laura) describe themselves as victims of bullying by fans who champion Carmilla and Laura and their relationship. Fans of Danny claim to have been derided and shamed to the extent that they no longer feel like they are part of the *Carmilla* fandom. One particular fan speaks about how they feel physical pain when Danny is portrayed as “a bitch” in Carmilla/Laura fanfiction because Danny is actually “warm, loyal, giving, and a fighter.”⁹⁹ She argues that Danny's portrayal as the villain is because “your [referring to other *Carmilla* fans] hate glasses are still on.” This fan is blaming non-Danny fans for an unflattering portrayal of the character in fanfiction, rather than acknowledging Danny's questionable actions. She is projecting her anger onto fans that have expressed dislike for Danny and reinterpreting that anger as hate. Once again negative affects are being dumped onto those who do not agree with a major part of the fandom. No Danny fans acknowledge in these online spaces that the character may be hated by some in the fandom because of her racist attitudes. Despite Danny's discriminatory actions, she continues to remain a beloved character amongst a vocal part of the fandom, while Mattie is largely left out of fan discourse on the web series.

I also locate elements of racial tension in the fight between The Dean and her army of vampires versus Laura and her band of friends plus one undead lover. The Dean considers herself superior because of her status as a goddess. She claims that Laura is not good enough for Carmilla because her humanity makes her fallible; Laura as a human being is lesser than

⁹⁹ @qualitytrashmaterial, “The amount of people that still hate Danny Lawrence...,” Tumblr, December 30, 2016, <https://qualitytrashmaterial.tumblr.com/post/155170365333/the-amount-of-people-that-still-here-danny>.

Carmilla because she does not possess super-strength, telekinesis, or pyrokinesis. Furthermore, because of her young age, Laura is not as worldly as Carmilla and definitely not even half as well-read. For example, in “Mommy Dearest” (S1, E32), The Dean possess Laura’s body via a cursed necklace. Carmilla confronts her mother, in Laura’s body, about sacrificing her first love, Elle, to “an abomination.” The Dean says the following:

That silly little creature couldn’t have loved you. The second she knew what you were, she spilled your secrets like an idiot school child. She was a cockroach. A wretched, crawling thing like this one [points to Laura’s body]. And you, my glittering girl, are a diamond. Stone cannot love flesh.”

In equating Elle and Laura to cockroaches, The Dean implies that their human lives means little in comparison her grand scheme to unleash hell on earth. The cockroach metaphor has also been used to describe immigrants, Jewish people, and other racialized groups. Moreover, she describes Carmilla as akin to a precious stone, one that is above the likes of a measly college student. Like the Death Eaters in the *Harry Potter* universe, The Dean’s views are similar to those who spout ideas about white racial superiority and racial purity. In this case, she essentially describes vampires as a superior race to humans.

Stanfill argues that the normativity of the fan label relies on fans occupying the socially valued positions of white, cisgender, and heterosexual.¹⁰⁰ While cisness and heterosexuality do not dominate the imaginary of femslash fandoms, the category of whiteness remains central. When Stanfill interviews two queer women of colour, Eri, a *Carmilla* fan, and Asher, a SwanQueen shipper,¹⁰¹ they state that while femslash fandoms have made them more comfortable with their own identities, white queer people within such fandoms should take on the responsibility of calling out racism and acknowledging their own biases. They ask for white

¹⁰⁰ Stanfill, “Fandom’s Normativity,” 22.

¹⁰¹ Swan Queen refers to the fanon romantic relationship between Regina (or The Evil Queen) and Emma Swan from the ABC television show *Once Upon A Time* (2011-2018).

fans to confront racism when they see it and to never assume that they know what it's like to go through something if they have not personally experienced it. Eri insists that white fans should "never stop listening to other people's experiences with oppression, and never stop learning".¹⁰² Asher's and Eri's experiences show how many English-language femslash fandoms are implicitly racist. By not acknowledging the problematic aspects of a white character killing a black central character, white fans of the series display their privilege. Furthermore, a lack of discussion about racial elements within *Carmilla* creates a fan space that is uncomfortable for a fan of color.

During the creators' panel of CarmillaCon, Steph Ouaknine, a white queer producer on *Carmilla*, said that she wished they had characters of color in the first season of the series.¹⁰³ She said this in response to a question posed by the moderator, Dana Piccoli, on what the creators wished they had done differently. Ouaknine's answer reflects an understanding amongst the creators of *Carmilla* that audiences should not content themselves with just seeing two white and relatively feminine women in love with one another. However, her response leads me to ask two questions: Since the series already makes many changes to the novella, why did they not introduce an original queer character of color in the first season or else make one of the central characters be of color? Does the *Carmilla* fandom share her dissatisfaction with the lack of characters of color in the first season?

The only way I find myself able to answer the first question is to argue that the *Carmilla* universe reflects the primarily white world of the writers and producers and an attempt was made to expand that world in season two and three. To answer the second question, I propose that certain fans of the series have expressed their discontent with the lack of queer characters of color in *Carmilla* by deciding to produce content with lesbians of color at the center of the

¹⁰² Stanfill, "Fans of Color in Femslash," 10.4.

¹⁰³ "Creators Panel" 00:28:19.

narrative. For example, one of the vendors at CarmillaCon was *Howl*, an in-production web series about a lesbian of color werewolf.¹⁰⁴ The story is clearly influenced by *Carmilla*, with the series following Kendale “Kenni” Monroe, whose interest in werewolves takes an investigative turn when people in her university town begin to disappear. Kenni’s investigation leads her to discover that the girl she is crushing on, Cordelia “Cordy” Blacktail, comes from a family of werewolves and it may be Cordy’s family that is behind the disappearances. However, this kind of fan work that centres characters of colour is not typical of *Carmilla* fandom. Unfortunately, *Howl* did not reach their fundraising goal.

The racism of the *Carmilla* fandom does not manifest as open hostility toward minorities, but as a refusal to examine or even acknowledge whiteness and racial inequality. As Stanfill argues, failing to consider whiteness has the effect of whitening the fan.¹⁰⁵ To ignore race is to support the racial status quo and to implicitly benefit from current racial systems. Declaring race as simply irrelevant without examining its social impact is problematic and makes it harder to recognize current inequalities, let alone disrupt them.¹⁰⁶ Due to its ambivalent relationship with race, the *Carmilla* fan community legitimizes certain affective connections with the media object over others. Therefore, while traces of the global lesbian *Carmilla* fandom can be sought out, they often go unnoticed under the clamoring of white fans.

3.4 Conclusion

In their discussion of “global fandom”, fan studies scholars C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby write about two approaches to media texts: a macro political and economic approach versus a micro approach, common to cultural studies, that studies how both texts and

¹⁰⁴ For more information see: <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/howl-a-short-film#/>.

¹⁰⁵ Stanfill, “Fandom’s Normativity,” 24.

¹⁰⁶ Stanfill, “Fandom’s Normativity,” 25.

people cross borders.¹⁰⁷ Another characteristic of the cultural studies approach is self-reflexivity i.e. the expectation of scholars to disclose their fannish pleasures.¹⁰⁸ My study of *Carmilla*'s fan culture falls in line with the cultural studies approach, in that I view *Carmilla* as a text from a particular society that fans from different cultures may respond to differently. For example, if I look at myself as a *Carmilla* fan and my attachment to this media object, I recognize that my emotional connection to the series stems from the fact that I discovered it when I was in a similar point in my life as Laura was in the first season—adjusting to life at university, trying to expand my social skills, learning how to live with someone very different from myself, and desperately crushing on someone. The series also gave me a space to feel comfortable in and express my sexuality, through my shipping of Laura and Carmilla, reblogging posts related to *Carmilla* on Tumblr, consuming *Carmilla* fanfiction, introducing my friends to the series, and—now—writing my graduate thesis on *Carmilla*.¹⁰⁹

However, my reaction to the lack of characters of colour in the first season and to Mattie's death in the second season was informed by my own lived experiences as a person of colour currently living in a majority white space. Therefore, I push back against Louisa Stein's conception of fandom as collectives that are bound together by emotional investment in media, but not geography and national identity.¹¹⁰ Fandom, as I conceive of it, is bound by both emotion and geography. I am part of the *Carmilla* fandom because of my emotional investment in the series, but at the same time I am isolated from the fandom because of my status as an Indian. Despite being an active fan in some ways, I didn't know about the creampieff global domination map or the call for translators until doing research for this thesis. Also, if I had not

¹⁰⁷ C. Lee Harrington and Denise D Beilby, "Global Fandom/Global Fan Studies," in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 179.

¹⁰⁸ Harrington and Beilby, "Global Fandom," 182.

¹⁰⁹ Shipping, a verb derived from the word relationship, is the desire expressed by certain fans to see two or more characters or people in a relationship with one another.

¹¹⁰ Stein, *Millennial Fandom: Television Audiences in the Transmedia Age*, 156.

found myself doing my graduate degree in Canada, I would have been unable to attend CarmillaCon, which was held in Toronto.

Fan scholars studying affect in online fandoms should consider the ways in which affective flows across online fan cultures are influenced by geography, culture, and race. Fandoms aptly illustrate the construction of community via emotion because they encourage people to come together online through ritualized practices. Such mediated participation evokes a sense of emotional belonging with distant others.¹¹¹ It is interesting that Döveling et al choose the word ‘other’ in their explanation of how participation in fan practices encourage a sense of belonging among people across the world, for if a sense of belonging permeated every fan equally, regardless of nationality and race, there would be no “other.” Therefore, even while explicitly claiming that fandom exists beyond the boundaries of geography and nationality, the authors gesture toward the presence of these boundaries within fandom.

Fan collectives online co-construct narratives as a way to continually engage with the fan object and as a coping mechanism after a series comes to an end or when an important character dies. Sharing in practices of co-construction, such as the production and consumption of *Carmilla* fanfiction on AO3 and the creation and reblogging of *Carmilla* related posts on Tumblr, serves as a building block for feelings of belonging. Participants tend to feel validated and supported in their respective communities. Trends within the fandom can set in motion waves of emotion that sweep the internet, inviting new participants from across the world to join in on commemorative practices such as fanfiction that also align with prevalent trends.

These prevalent trends are influenced by the interplay of positive and negative affects exchanged between fans via the internet. Inclusion within and exclusion from a fandom is determined by whether or not your emotions align with the emotions of the majority of the fandom. For example, Danny fans who ship Danny and Laura feel like they are pushed to the

¹¹¹ Döveling, Harju and Sommer, “From Mediatized Emotion to Digital Affect Cultures,” 6.

margins of the fandom because a majority of the *Carmilla* fandom ships Carmilla and Laura. However, those who dislike Danny because she killed Mattie also find themselves facing a lot of vitriol as a result of a vocal majority of the fandom championing Danny. Just as shared interests are a product of lived experience so are shared emotions. Therefore, the ways in which a fan aligns with the emotions of the majority of the fandom is dependent on their experiences, and a fan's experiences are connected to where they are from, where they live, the languages they speak, and the color of their skin. While the *Carmilla* fandom can be defined as a community of feeling—one that has formed over shared investment in a media object—its treatment of characters and fans of colour make clear the exclusions that reinforce the creation of fandoms along the lines of national and racial boundaries.

Chapter 4: Attending CarmillaCon - Lesbians, Affect, Inclusion, and Exclusion

4.1 Introduction

On October 5–6, 2019, at the Sheraton Centre Toronto, I was able to attend what I then considered my happiest place on Earth—the first ever CarmillaCon. The convention, dedicated solely to the *Carmilla* fandom, was organised by a group of *Carmilla* fans from across North America.¹¹² When I first entered the convention space, I remember being excited to be amongst people who loved this web series with the same intensity as me. However, a sense of loneliness quickly set in, as I noticed that almost everyone seemed to already know everyone else. Even the one friend that I made, who was from Germany, had multiple friends attending the Con. As I hung around taking in all the people and merchandise around me, overwhelmed with the feeling of being an outsider, the question that kept coming back to me was: Why do I feel this way?

During conversations with people standing in line waiting for panels, autographs, and photo-ops, I started piecing together some possible answers. Most of my fellow fans had previously met each other online and in person at multiple Cons dedicated to queer fandoms where the *Carmilla* cast and crew had been present—particularly ClexaCon (Las Vegas) and Love Fan Fest (Barcelona). Meeting the cast and crew of the series over and over again gave them the opportunity to develop close relationships with other fans within the Con circuit, as well as the actors and creators. These tightknit fan circuits are difficult to penetrate for fans who may not have access to resources that allow them to travel the world, including many fans of color like myself.

¹¹² “Mission Statement,” *CarmillaCon*, Ask Ware Productions LLC, 2019, <https://www.carmillacon.com/mission-statement>.

Fan studies scholars Katherine Larsen and Lynn Zubernis have explored hierarchies that exist in convention spaces on the basis of class and race, hierarchies that manifest in CarmillaCon as well. In this chapter I argue that CarmillaCon creates an affective space in which fans, moderators, and artists engage in acts of inclusion and exclusion. I propose that the online and physical worlds of the *Carmilla* fandom co-constitute and parallel one another. CarmillaCon and the online *Carmilla* fandom create one another in that online fans of the series come together in the physical space of the convention and CarmillaCon contributes to the online fandom by uploading content on their Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram accounts. The two parallel one another by encouraging affective bonds based on similar inclusions and exclusions.

The whiteness of the *Carmilla* fandom became apparent in the physical space of CarmillaCon because it was not obscured by the anonymity of the internet. From what I was able to observe, a majority of CarmillaCon attendees seemed to be young, white, queer, cis women and non-binary people. I noticed only seven or eight fans of color, including the volunteers. When I chatted with these fans of color, most said they were either born in Canada, had moved here with their parents, or were studying in Canada. No one had travelled from Asia, Africa, or South America to attend the Con specifically. Fans who had traveled to Canada to attend the Con were from the United States, certain parts of Europe like Germany and Spain, and the United Kingdom. While I did see older *Carmilla* fans, the majority seemed to be in their late teens/early to mid-twenties. Many attendees had come with their friends or significant others who were equally involved with the series. The venue made an effort to be accessible to all, with gender-neutral bathrooms, priority lines and special seating for people with physical disabilities, and sign language interpreters. Fans with declared disabilities were given badges with stickers on them so that volunteers could easily recognize them and come to their aid if necessary.

This chapter compares my experience of CarmillaCon with gender studies scholar Liz Millward's research on lesbian fan conventions devoted to *Xena: Warrior Princess*.¹¹³ While *Xena* is a network show without canonical lesbians and *Carmilla* is a web series with a central lesbian relationship, their fandoms have certain things in common. Just as Millward shows that fan conventions sustain the "Xenaverse" long after the series ended, I argue that memories of the *Carmilla* series are kept alive through the series' online fandom and CarmillaCon. She proposes that the *Xena* conventions create "lesbian space," in that they are populated by lesbians and also provide lesbian possibilities for women who discovered their sexuality through the show.¹¹⁴

Millward claims that such spaces offer opportunities for both escape and self-realisation—a space in which fans can experiment with their sexual identity, find community, and escape from the oppressiveness of heterosexuality.¹¹⁵ The *Carmilla* series' fandom is similarly populated by lesbians and has aided some fans in the discovery of their sexual and gender identity. *Carmilla* fans also attend conventions and come together online in search of a supportive community that they may not have at home. However, Millward argues that these "lesbian spaces" do not challenge heteronormative space. She rejects this understanding of "lesbian spaces" because it assumes that there is always a heterosexual space waiting to be queered.¹¹⁶ Millward claims that heterosexual people often resist challenges to their space either by establishing clear boundaries between themselves and the other or by incorporating the other into their body politic and reducing the other's radical nature to "permitted spectacle".¹¹⁷ I disagree with Millward on this point because she fails to account for lesbians adopting spaces traditionally considered heterosexual for their own ends. While fan

¹¹³ Millward, "New Xenaland," 427.

¹¹⁴ Millward, "New Xenaland," 430.

¹¹⁵ Millward, "New Xenaland," 431.

¹¹⁶ Millward, "New Xenaland," 429.

¹¹⁷ Millward, "New Xenaland," 429.

conventions may have begun with gatherings of men, it did not stop feminists and queer people from using similar spaces and formats to discuss media that excited them.

While chapters two and three explore inclusion and exclusion in online fan spaces, this chapter investigates those dynamics in the physical space of the fan convention. I will explore the communities created by a matrix of conventions dedicated to lesbian fandoms, the convention as an affective space, and the inclusions and exclusions that result from this affective space. The first section describes the existing network of queer conventions - the actors, creators, moderators, fans, and texts that circulate within this network. I will also grapple with the kind of lesbian space created by CarmillaCon and other queer Cons. The next section will deal with type of affective space that CarmillaCon is and its similarities and differences from the online spaces described in chapter two and three. The next two sections will analyze exclusions I experienced at CarmillaCon on the basis of socio-economic class and race. Finally, in the conclusion, I will discuss how affect from online spaces translates into offline spaces.

When I designed this thesis, I had intended to interview Carmilla fans that I met at CarmillaCon about their fan activities. However, it did not work out. Seven fans who had expressed interest in speaking to me and gave me their contact information did not respond when I got in touch with them after the Con. I even tried to get in touch with the organizers of CarmillaCon and received no response. Therefore, the evidence I use in this chapter is based on my own observations and experiences.

4.2 The Lesbian Matrix of Fan Conventions

While there are several conventions dedicated to LGBTQ+ sci-fi, erotica, gaming, and comic fandoms, such as Outlantacon (Atlanta), FlameCon (New York City), Queers and Comics (New York City), and HavenCon (Austin), the *Carmilla* cast and crew and the series'

fans travel to three main conventions: ClexaCon (Las Vegas), Love Fan Fest (Barcelona), and now, CarmillaCon (Toronto). In this section I argue that these three fan conventions create lesbian spaces by extending the universes of the series they are dedicated to, allowing queer women to enmesh fictional lesbian worlds with their real lives.

ClexaCon, started in 2017, was a product of the outrage surrounding Lexa's death in CW television show *The 100* (2014-present).¹¹⁸ Clexa is the "ship" name for Clarke Griffin (Eliza Taylor) and Head Lexa (Alycia Debnam-Carey). ClexaCon is a multi-fandom event for LGBTQ women and their allies that takes place over two days in Las Vegas every April. An offshoot Con was also organised in London in 2018. The guests are usually LGBTQ actors from shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The L Word: Generation Q* (2019-present), *One Day at a Time* (2017-present), and the nonbinary queer web series *These Them*s (2020), and content creators, including YouTubers. The *Carmilla* cast and crew has attended every ClexaCon, including ClexaCon London. Panelists at ClexaCon include lesbian actresses of South Asian descent (e.g., Alexandra D'Sa), queer researchers with their own podcasts (e.g., Amanda Law, Amanda Overton, and August McLaughlin), and other creatives dedicated to making queer content. ClexaCon also organizes panels on self-publishing books and how to ensure a diverse crew when making films, keeping in line with their mandate "to lay the foundation for improved visibility within the media while encouraging more LGBTQ women to participate in creating the stories they desire."¹¹⁹

Love Fan Fest, which began in 2018 in Barcelona, is similar to ClexaCon, in that it is for multiple queer fandoms and primarily focused on lesbian fans. The 2020 Fest is scheduled to take place over two days in June. Their guests also include LGBTQ actors and creators from the same shows and those knowledgeable about queer content. The *Carmilla* cast and crew has

¹¹⁸ "FAQ's," *ClexaCon*, ClexaCon LLC, 2017, <https://clexacon.com/about/faqs/>.

¹¹⁹ "Vision," *ClexaCon*, ClexaCon LLC, 2017, <https://clexacon.com/about/vision/#>.

also been a regular presence at Love Fan Fest. I heard many a *Carmilla* fan at CarmillaCon talk about having attended ClexaCon, which had already happened, and their plans to attend Love Fan Fest. Most of these fans would not have had to spend time, money, or energy applying for a visa to go to the United States or Spain because they were either North American or European. This section will explore the ways in which CarmillaCon and other LGBTQ+ Cons create lesbian spaces that encourage the formation of exclusive circuits of actors, creators, producers, moderators, and fans.

Liz Millward argues that understanding lesbian space as the anti-thesis to heteronormative space limits the ways in which lesbian spaces are discussed.¹²⁰ However, I propose that ClexaCon, Love Fan Fest, and CarmillaCon create lesbian spaces by challenging the white, cisgender, and male history of the fan convention. This history is of course complicated, as exemplified by the founding of WisCon in 1977, a Con dedicated to feminist science fiction fandoms that continues to this day.¹²¹ Writer Anthony Gramuglia traces the beginning of the fan convention in North America to PhilCon, started in 1936 as a small group of straight white cis male science fiction fans in New York City.¹²² The 1950s saw the introduction of bigger, more streamlined conventions such as Disclave and Lunacon—both dedicated to science fiction fandoms. In the 1960s, fan culture exploded and more than 17 conventions were introduced. In 1971, one of the largest fan conventions in the world was founded—ComicCon in San Diego. The 1980s saw the introduction of fandom-specific conventions, a tradition that continues till today, as seen in the organisation of CarmillaCon. Fan studies scholar Suzanne Scott argues that fandoms continue to be seen as the domain of

¹²⁰ Millward, “New Xenaland,” 428.

¹²¹ “History,” *WisCon*, SF3 – Society for the Furtherance & Study of Fantasy & Science Fiction, 2016, <http://wiscon.net/about/history/>.

¹²² Anthony Gramuglia, “The Rise and History of Comic Conventions,” *Vocal Geeks*, 2017, <https://vocal.media/geeks/the-rise-and-history-of-comic-conventions>.

men,¹²³ an assumption that is supported by the fan demographic attending many fan conventions, important exceptions being WisCon and anime conventions. In contrast, ClexaCon, Love Fan Fest, and CarmillaCon make queer female fans visible by choosing to focus primarily on lesbian fandoms.

CarmillaCon is also a lesbian space through its contribution to extending the *Carmilla* series. Millward argues that the Xenaverse continues to be maintained by fans through their online and offline networks long after the show finished airing.¹²⁴ Similarly, CarmillaCon extends the *Carmilla* universe by encouraging fans to form bonds around the series, talk about the series, write about it, and feel a sense of belonging to the fandom. Thus, through the physical space of CarmillaCon, *Carmilla* is brought into closer contact with the real world of the lesbian fan. Conversely, the online fan world is pulled closer to the physical world of the lesbian fan. ClexaCon and Love Fan Fest do similar work by bringing together multiple lesbian fandoms. ClexaCon and Love Fan Fest not only bring into contact the space of a lesbian show and the life of its lesbian fans, but also bring into conversation the spaces of various lesbian shows.

The lesbian spaces of ClexaCon, Love Fan Fest, and CarmillaCon create inclusions and exclusions based on class, race, and even other queer and gender identities. ClexaCon came under fire in 2019 for harassing non-binary vendors, not providing pronoun badges (which led to instances of misgendering), and not having gender-neutral bathrooms.¹²⁵ These policies suggest that the 2019 ClexaCon was a convention space dedicated to cisgender lesbians, exclusionary of nonbinary identities. I have not come across such criticisms of Love Fan Fest.

¹²³ Suzanne Scott, "Introduction: Make Fandom Great Again," in *Fake Geek Girls: Fandom, Gender, and the Convergence Culture Industry*, (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 5.

¹²⁴ Millward, "New Xenaland," 430.

¹²⁵ Samantha Puc, "#Clexapocalypse: What Went Wrong at ClexaCon," *The Beat*, 17 April, 2019, <https://www.comicsbeat.com/clexapocalypse-clexacon-2019-complaints/>.

In contrast to ClexaCon, CarmillaCon organizers provided attendees with pronoun badges, made sure to ask a person's pronouns when addressing them, and constantly informed us of the gender-neutral bathrooms present on the floor. Unlike ClexaCon, CarmillaCon ensured the inclusion of multiple gender identities, possibly because one of the series' central characters is non-binary. Still, most of the cast and crew of the series are white, queer, cisgender women.

All three Cons exclude certain fans on the basis of class. The price for a general admission pass to both ClexaCon and CarmillaCon is approximately 240 CAD. A standard pass at ClexaCon provides admission to all three days of programming, access to general panels, workshops, the vendor floor, the badge pick-up party, and other free events, as well as entrance to all ClexaCon Film Festival screenings. The general pass at CarmillaCon provides admission to both days and access to all the panels. Fans have the option to purchase photographs and autographs as add-ons. For Love Fan Fest a standard ticket costs only 30 Euros (45.70 CAD), which allows attendees entry into the convention on both days. However, fans must purchase products, conferences, and workshops separately and the standard ticket does not allow fans to attend panels with their favorite actors or creators. Higher-cost passes to Love Fan Fest, which cost between 400 and 1200 CAD, give priority access to panels, the chance to attend workshops, and the opportunity to hang out with actors in a more intimate setting.

Media studies scholar Lincoln Geraghty described fans collecting expensive memorabilia as a way of accruing economic and cultural capital.¹²⁶ Attending conventions is also a way for fans to amass economic and cultural capital. Usually fans buy collectible objects at conventions. Large collections establish the intensity of fannish connections to a media object and certain items can also be sold for good money.¹²⁷ Purchasing expensive convention

¹²⁶ Lincoln Geraghty, "Class, Capital, and Collecting in Media Fandom," in *The Routledge Companion to Media Fandom*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 218.

¹²⁷ Geraghty, "Class, Capital, and Collecting in Media Fandom," 218.

passes also give fans the opportunity to get closer to their beloved stars, which makes them rise faster in fan hierarchies. I cannot speak to how racial dynamics play out at ClexaCon and Love Fan Fest. However, as an Indian woman, I witnessed how racial as well as class exclusions take place at CarmillaCon.

ClexaCon, Love Fan Fest, and CarmillaCon challenge the straight male history of the fan convention. These conventions also encourage queer female fans to form bonds with one another over a shared interest in lesbian media. However, that does not mean that these fan conventions are without exclusions, particularly on the basis of class, race, and trans/nonbinary identities.

4.3 CarmillaCon as an Affective Space: Examples of Inclusion

Just as the online spaces of YouTube, AO3, and Tumblr encourage a sense of belonging amongst fans through the creation of affective communities, so do fan conventions. Fan scholars Katherine Larsen and Lynn Zubernis claim that all human beings strive to find places in which they feel comfortable; thus, some fans are drawn toward roleplaying games, fan art, fanfiction, fanvids, and conventions. Larsen and Zubernis state that fans may feel “an acute sense of being at home” when attending their first fan convention.¹²⁸ According to fan scholar Nicolle Lamerichs, the affective space of the convention is based on the attendees, the staff, and the location itself.¹²⁹ She argues that one of the biggest impulses for fans to attend conventions is to meet friends or make new ones. Lamerichs argues that the social space of the convention is structured such that fans engage with one another during panels, autograph and

¹²⁸ Katherine Larsen and Lynn Zubernis, introduction to *Fandom At The Crossroads: Celebration, Shame and Fan/Producer Relationships*, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 9.

¹²⁹ Nicolle Lamerichs, “Embodied Fantasy: The affective space of anime conventions,” in *The Ashgate research companion to fan cultures*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 268.

photograph lines, and workshops.¹³⁰ Therefore, the give and take of affect is built into the very fabric of the fan convention. Fan conventions create a sense of intimacy amongst fans, actors, creators, and moderators through the sharing of affect. This section will analyze how the affective work done by CarmillaCon corresponds to and differs from a general understanding of the affective work done by conventions and the ways in which the transmission of affect in online fan spaces is similar to and different from offline fan spaces.

When I first heard about CarmillaCon, something akin to a squeal left my mouth. I had never attended a Con before and to be able to have my first Con experience at one dedicated to a much beloved web series of mine seemed too good to be true. This joy coupled with the fact that I was doing my thesis on *Carmilla* and would be able to share it with people who were as passionate about the series as me caused an unearthly sound to escape my lips. I went to the first day of CarmillaCon ready to make friends and feel the sense of belonging described by Larsen and Zubernis. When I entered the convention space, groups of people were standing around talking to each other, laughing, and sharing breakfast. The registration room, too, was filled with people standing in line picking up their badges, bags, and tickets for autographs and photo-ops. While standing in line, people shared smiles and greeted each other. Everyone, including myself, exuded a sense of contentment at the knowledge that they were surrounded by people who loved *Carmilla*.

The space was designed to facilitate interaction between the fans, actors, creators, and moderators. There were designated rooms for the panels, photo-ops, autographs, and workshops, which were conducted by the stars and creators of the series. While the actors had their own rooms, they used the same corridors and washrooms as the fans, often accompanied by a volunteer. While waiting for the first panel to begin, I entered into a casual conversation with a girl from Germany. She and I hung out on both days and even exchanged numbers before

¹³⁰ Lamerichs, “Embodied Fantasy,” 270.

the convention ended. My friend from Germany and a bunch of other CarmillaCon attendees bumped into Sharon Belle, who plays Danny on the series, in a washroom and she ended up talking to them for 10 minutes. Sharing the same public spaces as the cast and crew of the series encouraged a sense of intimacy between the fans and them. Between the rooms for the workshops and the panels, artists and fans had set up merchandise stalls, which people would often hang around while waiting for panels to start. Fans would also sit on the floor right outside the panel room, on their phones, eating, playing the guitar, and even playing card games. Groups of friends and strangers would form in this area, with people sharing how they first got into the series, their favorite episodes, scenes, actors and characters, fanfiction and fan art they may have created or enjoy, and how many other Cons they have met the cast at. These groups are examples of how affect shared on the basis of similar interests create bonds between people.

A sense of intimacy between the cast and crew and the fans of the series was also facilitated through panels, autographs, photo-ops, and workshops. The chance to get autographs and photo-ops gave fans the chance to meet their favorite actors face-to-face, touch them, and talk to them. These interactions often get labelled as friendship. For example, after standing in line for an hour and half waiting for an autograph, it was time for Natasha Negovanlis (who plays Carmilla) to take a break. However, she refused to take her lunch break, instead choosing to plough through the autographs, and the person in front of me reacted by saying “Oh, that’s so Natasha.” That statement implies a kind of intimacy which indicates that one knows what a person is usually like. When I told Negovanlis about my thesis while waiting for her autograph, she responded in surprise “I didn’t know I had friends in academia.” Even while recounting this story in this chapter, I have a huge smile on my face because I remember the rush associated with being called a friend by someone I had as my wallpaper for a full year. All the other cast members also responded positively when I told them of my thesis, which gave me a sense of validation in my project. My thesis functioned as a kind of fannish cultural

capital by sparking interest in the cast and bringing me closer to them. As a result, the affective space created by CarmillaCon involved the encouragement of a closeness between fans and actors.

I argue that the affective work of CarmillaCon is similar to the Cons studied by Larsen, Zubernis, and Lamerichs in the following ways: In the creation of a space dedicated solely to *Carmilla* fans, the Con encouraged attendees to feel a sense of belonging based on everyone's shared love for the series. Additionally, as argued by Lamerichs, the space of the convention was constructed so as to prompt the flow of affect between the fans, the cast and crew, the volunteers, and the moderators. By packing people closely together in rooms for several hours over the course of two days, CarmillaCon acted as a catalyst for a sense of intimacy to form between everyone present.

However, where CarmillaCon diverges from other Cons is in the depth of the shared intimacy. Larsen and Zubernis claim that while the convention space gives the impression of a more intimate, less mediated space, this sense of intimacy and closeness is often illusory because the cast and crew are usually sequestered in separate rooms and then transported to panels, autographs, and photo-ops via back hallways and kitchen elevators.¹³¹ I argue that the intimacy fostered by CarmillaCon between fans and the cast and crew was more intense. While the actors were given their own rooms and were often ushered onstage for a panel after everyone was already seated, they roamed the same hallways as the fans and even used the same washrooms as fans. I attribute the blurring of the separation between the cast and crew of the series and the fans to three factors: the *Carmilla* fandom is relatively small, Con was not organised or funded by industry players but by fans of the series itself, and the actors are not big stars.

¹³¹ Katherine Larsen and Lynn Zubernis, "Lost in Space: Participatory Fandom and the Negotiation of Fan Spaces," in *Fandom At The Crossroads: Celebration, Shame and Fan/Producer Relationships*, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012) 21, 25.

Similar to the way digital affect cultures encourage bonds of sentiment based on shared interests, so does the convention space. *Carmilla* fans online come together and share affect through fan art, fanvids, fanfiction, and even text posts documenting their love for the series. During CarmillaCon, fans shared affect through similar ways, by selling their art or passing their art around for fellow fans to see, talking about why they first fell in love with the series and how they have encouraged other people in their lives to watch it, talking about their favorite fanfics, and distributing gingerbread cookies as a reminder of *Carmilla*'s Christmas Special. I propose that CarmillaCon can also be an example of an archive of lesbian feeling through its documentation. Posting pictures of the Con on Instagram and videos of the full panel on YouTube makes our love for the series public and grants fans who could not make it to the Con the ability to participate in this fannish activity. This meshing together of the physical and online *Carmilla* fandom exemplifies how the two are co-constitutive. While the *Carmilla* fandom offline seems to transcend exclusions of class and race, and be a community purely based on an intense affective engagement with a shared media object, this is far from the truth. The convention space makes explicit these very exclusions in the *Carmilla* fandom.

4.4 Fan Hierarchies and Class

In this section I will explore the hierarchies prevalent at CarmillaCon on the basis of class related to the kind of access fans have to each other and the cast and crew of the series. Searching for a sense of belonging at CarmillaCon, I found some polite conversation over shared cookies, while perusing merchandise stalls, and waiting for panels to start. Even though I did make a friend, I encountered more impenetrable groups. These groups had met each other before, usually first online and then in person at a variety of Cons. Fans who attended other Cons also had the added benefit of meeting the cast previously, which increased their sense of comfort and validation. Furthermore, there was a separation between levels of access at the

Con: from “Creampuff (\$170 USD, General Admission)” to “Visiting Professor (\$279 USD, VIP)” and “Silas Board Member (\$419 USD, VIP).”¹³²

Those who had purchased Visiting Professor or Silas Board Member passes were given priority seating during panels, priority line access during autographs and photo-ops, and VIP goodie bags. As a result, fans who had more access to funds were given the opportunity to get closer to the cast and crew faster. Even though CarmillaCon was smaller and only in its first year, the prices for passes and autographs, photo-ops, selfies were similar to that of ClexaCon, which is larger and in its third year.

Similar to most human groups, fan spaces also tend to be hierarchical, with multiple routes to the top.¹³³ Larsen and Zubernis argue that fans actively use money to set themselves apart.¹³⁴ Fans are able to buy proximity to their favorite actors because buying expensive convention packages gives them the opportunity to get seats in the front, priority access to certain events, and access to meet-and-greets. At CarmillaCon, those with Silas University Board and Visiting Professor passes were seated at the front during panels, while Creampuffs were seated towards the back of the room. VIPs also had autographs and photo-ops included in their passes, with the opportunity to buy more add-ons during the Con. Silas Board Members were also given the opportunity to hang out with the cast at a trivia night. Those with general admission passes were also able to buy add-ons—autographs, selfies, photo-ops, and meet and greets—but every add-on cost \$40 CAD. I spent a total of \$200 CAD on the first day, just to get autographs from a majority of cast and a selfie with Negovanlis. These prices alone are enough to exclude those *Carmilla* fans who have a limited access to resources. Those who are able to buy their way closer to the object of fandom ascend higher in the fan hierarchy.

¹³² “Tickets,” *CarmillaCon*, Ask Ware Productions LLC, 2019, <https://www.carmillacon.com/tickets>.

¹³³ Larsen and Zubernis, “Lost in Space,” 30.

¹³⁴ Larsen and Zubernis, “Lost in Space,” 25.

Forming a personal relationship with the object of fandom is another way fans rise within the hierarchy, and it is also a form of validation.¹³⁵ Larsen and Zubernis argue that fans who are able to enter the protected space of the performer gain both privilege and status.¹³⁶ For example, as I was waiting for another cast member's autograph, I noticed one of the vendors, who is also a well-known fan artist, showing Negovanlis something on their phone and laughing with her while leaning on her autograph table. As the artist engaged in this banter, a few people waited in line for their own turn to interact with the actor. Such casual relationships with the cast and crew are usually created by establishing contact with them several times. While vendors had separate badges indicating their status, they had to stand in the same lines as non-artists and non-vendors to access the panels, workshops, autographs, and photo-ops. However, I am unsure if vendors had to purchase add-ons or if the add-ons were a part of their remuneration. One way of cultivating casual relationships with the cast and crew is by attending a variety of Cons, where they will be present. The ability to attend multiple cons across the world is also a privilege. One must be economically privileged to not only afford the Con and add-on fees, but also travel, accommodation, and food and drink.

Some of the *Carmilla* fans I spoke to at CarmillaCon who had attended other Cons around the globe were in their late teens/early twenties. I assumed that a number of them were in university based on their complaints about the number of assignments waiting for them at home. One must come from a culture and a family that is comfortable with young adults travelling the world to attend Cons, to spend most of their time amongst virtual friends and strangers. As an Indian woman with an overprotective mother, I know that I would have never been able to attend CarmillaCon if I was not studying in Canada. My experience was validated by a Pakistani girl I met at the Con who had recently moved to Toronto with her parents. She

¹³⁵ Larsen and Zubernis, "Lost in Space," 30.

¹³⁶ Larsen and Zubernis, "Lost in Space," 30.

jokingly proclaimed her happiness at being able to attend the Con, because if she was still in her home country it would have been impossible.

When I dreamt of attending my first fan convention, I would get starry-eyed thinking of sharing physical space with people who enjoyed the same things I did. I imagined participating in endless conversations, sharing inside jokes with fellow fans, and forgetting about the outside world. Looking back at my experiences at CarmillaCon, there are some fond memories—making a friend from across the world, eating gingerbread cookies, interacting with the cast and crew, and geeking out over my favorite *Carmilla* moments. However, I also remember feeling extremely lonely, so much so that I would use my free time between panels or autographs talking to my friends on the phone. Interrogating the creation of fan hierarchies on the basis of class is one way in which I attempt to explain that sense of loneliness. Attending Cons all over the world, purchasing VIP passes, buying add-ons are not luxuries everyone can afford. Those who can afford it end up feeling more comfortable in convention spaces. While *Carmilla* fans online are able to interact without the specter of class, the physical space of the convention makes class divisions visible.

Meeting the cast and crew and each other at multiple Cons forms fan circuits that are very difficult to break through. Friends and fellow *Carmilla* fans talked to each other and the people they recognized, often paying little to no attention to those they did not. While hanging out with me, my German friend met a lot of people she knew because of her participation in the fan circuit. They talked with each other while I was left idling in the background. Along with exclusions based on class, I also noticed racial exclusions at CarmillaCon. Initially, I attributed my sense of isolation to my awkwardness and social anxiety; however, towards the end of the Con, I met and spoke to a few outgoing first-time Con-goers whom I also noticed idling around, usually on their phones. Most of these first time Con-goer's were white and would often get swept up into conversation with other fans while idling around. They were

even asked to join group activities such as card games in the break between panels. I was left to my own devices, sitting only two or three spots away from them. Such instances led me to conclude that I was not only excluded because I was a first time Con-goer but also because of my race.

4.5 Race and Whiteness at CarmillaCon

In chapter three I posed a question that plagued me while watching *Carmilla* - where are queer characters of color on the series? I did not find any other *Carmilla* fans that echoed my concerns until I read Mel Stanfill's interview with multiple queer, non-binary fans of color. One of the people she interviewed, Eri, talks about their disappointing experience as a *Carmilla* fan of color. Only in season two did the show introduce three characters of color: Mel, Theo, and Mattie. As I wrote in the last chapter, Mattie Belmonde was praised by a few for being one of the only well-developed black vampires to exist in media, and fans loved her for her wit, grace, intelligence, and wide smile. When Danny killed Mattie at the end of season two, fans debated whether Danny should have done it, but no one online raised the racial implications of the killing. Even after Danny killed Mattie, a vocal part of the fandom continued to love her and the actor who plays her. As I mentioned in chapter three, there are three types of Danny fans: those who love her and ship her with Laura; those who love her but ship Laura and Carmilla; and those who are indifferent to pairings but believe that Danny's character was let down by the writing. This section will analyze Mattie's absence from CarmillaCon, both physically and from conversation, the dominating presence of Danny fans, my own experiences as a fan of color during the Con, and how the Con may fail as a safe space for those of color and not within the fan circuit.

When CarmillaCon was first announced, there were some fans who wondered whether Sophia Walker (who plays Mattie Belmonde) would attend. Someone tweeted to CarmillaCon

in February 2019, asking “Are Sophia Walker and Shannon kook gonna be there as well.”¹³⁷ In a video released on Twitter four months before CarmillaCon,¹³⁸ Sophia Walker sent her love and urged all creampuffs to attend CarmillaCon but also announced that she would not be able to attend because she was going to be on stage. The production and venue were not mentioned. However, at the Con, conversations about Mattie were sparse. She was mentioned once or twice during the panels, most prominently during the Creator’s Panel. Writer Jordan Hall, in reference to her decision to introduce Mattie, spoke of finding this character of color in a novel steeped with misogyny, homophobia, and racism, and her desire to rewrite her history.¹³⁹ During the same panel, producer Steph Ouaknine expressed regret over not having more characters of color in the first season.¹⁴⁰ Mattie, Mel, and Theo were also missing from the fan art on sale. Most of the fan art featured was of Carmilla and Laura. There were a few images of a haggard-looking Danny striking a strong pose and some of LaFontaine and Perry. I found only one cast image featuring Mel but none including Mattie or Theo. In contrast, there were many more instances of moderators, the cast, and the fans acknowledging Danny’s importance to the series, both due to Sharon Belle’s presence at the Con and the fandom’s love for Danny.

Danny’s tense relationship with Mel and her role in Mattie’s death were not discussed at CarmillaCon. At the all-cast panel, writer and moderator Dana Piccoli, who has moderated Carmilla panels at ClexaCon as well, asked each cast member a question and when she reached Belle her opening statement was “You know I’ve always been a Danny stan.”¹⁴¹ The audience erupted into laughter and applause, while I let out a soft sigh and rolled my eyes. She then proceeded to ask about what a Danny spin-off show would look like, while audience members

¹³⁷ @gayladyfarts. “Are Sophia Walker and Shannon kook gonna be there as well.” Twitter, February 4, 2019, 5:25 p.m., <https://twitter.com/gayladyfarts/status/1092549849487233026>.

¹³⁸ @CarmillaCon. “Special Message from #SophiaWalker #CarmillaCon.” Twitter, June 19, 2019, 12:03 p.m., <https://twitter.com/CarmillaCon/status/1141375907237683200>.

¹³⁹ “Creators Panel” 00:32:07.

¹⁴⁰ “Creators Panel” 00:28:19.

¹⁴¹ “Cast Panel” 00:10:29.

hooted, laughed, and clapped. In another panel, Sharon Belle was introduced onto the stage by moderators Belinda and Angie (wives and hosts of the podcast StyriaTypical)¹⁴² with the exclamation “we love her...we love Danny...Sharon Belle!”¹⁴³ Belinda was also wearing an “I Heart Danny Lawrence” sweatshirt.

Nicole Stamp, the actor who plays Mel, was also present at CarmillaCon. She was the only actor of color present at the Con. During the panels she was funny, charming, and very witty. She even told us about how she conceived of Mel when first auditioning for the part. Nicole thought of Mel as a fierce feminist warrior who was committed fighting against inequality,¹⁴⁴ a comment that I clapped hard at because Mel is unflinching in her quest for truth and justice. On the same panel, when asked about what she learnt about her character while playing her, Sharon Belle responded that “I kinda just thought she was just like your typical, like, basic jock kinda character...and as the story evolved, I was like she’s a big softie on the inside.”¹⁴⁵ The idea of Danny as an overprotective, gentle and kind person is shared by many in the *Carmilla* fandom, as made explicit in Danny’s treatment at the Con and also those who came to her defense online.

In several experiences at CarmillaCon, I felt uncomfortable due to the color of my skin and my accent. CarmillaCon’s mission statement states: “We respect the varied identities and experiences of this global fandom...There will be no tolerance for ableist, transphobic, homophobic, or racist language or behavior.”¹⁴⁶ However, what categorizes racist behavior has not been outlined. Am I proposing that people at the Con demonstrated outwardly racist behavior? No. Did I feel a certain sense of exclusion because of my race? Yes. Education

¹⁴² StyriaTypical is a podcast dedicated to close analyses of *Carmilla* content.

¹⁴³ “Adonis Hunt Panel” 00:01:01.

¹⁴⁴ “Adonis Hunt Panel” 00:05:37.

¹⁴⁵ “Adonis Hunt Panel” 00:02:36.

¹⁴⁶ “Mission Statement,” *CarmillaCon*, Ask Ware Productions LLC, 2019, <https://www.carmillacon.com/mission-statement>.

scholar Mary Ann Hunter argues that cultivating a safe space is less about establishing the conditions of its existence and more about asking two important questions: “How are the participants invited to collaborate in the production of safe creative space? And how are moments of presence collectively experienced, acknowledged and reflected upon?”¹⁴⁷

When I got into casual conversations with white *Carmilla* fans, I was often asked a handful of dreaded questions: Where are you from? And what brought you to Canada? However, the most obvious exclusion that took place based on my race was when I was not invited to a Discord chat. Discord, originally a social media website for gamers, requires you to be invited into a particular fandom thread instead of being open to anyone. While waiting for an autograph, I was talking with three white people: a Canadian I had met during a panel and two other people, one from America and one from Britain. The American and British fans were friends and had started a Discord chat with other *Carmilla* fans across North America and Europe. While casually talking to us, they invited my acquaintance to the Discord chat but not me. Additionally, after my acquaintance left, they stopped talking to me and started chatting with one another. Even when my acquaintance was around, they rarely acknowledged anything I said, choosing to talk almost solely with them. My acquaintance was also a first time Con-goer, having watched the series in early 2019. Therefore, their dismissal of me could not have been because I had not attended other Cons. The only thing I could possibly have done wrong while interacting with them was being brown. Moreover, the absence of any conversations at the Con about racial relations on the series—the lack of characters of color, Mattie’s death, Mel’s status as a secondary character, and the uncritical celebration of Danny’s character—gestures toward a space that may acknowledge racial disparities, but does not actively engage

¹⁴⁷ Mary Ann Hunter, “Cultivating the Art of Safe Space,” *Research in Drama Education* 13, no. 1 (2008): 19.

with them. By failing to encourage discussions about race and the exclusions associated with its global fandom, CarmillaCon failed as a safe space for its fans of color.

My experiences of and at CarmillaCon suggest that the online and offline *Carmilla* fandom react to race in similar ways. While there seems to be an acknowledgement of racial diversity and a proposed celebration of it, there is a lack of engagement with it. When Mattie was killed on the series, several fans expressed outrage, but more with Laura's betrayal of Carmilla's trust and less with a central black character being killed by a white character as a consequence of false accusations. On the other hand, a number of *Carmilla* fans defended Danny's actions by claiming that she acted in self-defence. Similar to the fans who expressed sympathy for Danny, the organizers of CarmillaCon also failed to confront the exclusions that took place on the basis of race. Furthermore, a love for the character Danny permeates a large part of the *Carmilla* fandom both online and offline. Her fans seem to focus on her fierce protectiveness, which eclipses her more problematic suspicion of those she considers "other." The default whiteness of the *Carmilla* fandom becomes explicit when not hidden behind creative usernames and display pictures.

4.6 Conclusion

Through this chapter I have brought into focus the interconnected relationship between online and offline Carmilla fandom. Similar to the ways in which YouTube, AO3, and Tumblr encourage fans of the series to form affective bonds through certain structural characteristics such as the ability to comment on, tag, and reblog fan works, CarmillaCon also encouraged its attendees to form affective bonds by creating a sense of intimacy through how the convention space was organised. When fans, actors, and creators are packed tightly in common spaces and use the same hallways and washrooms, affective bonds based on shared interests are bound to form. However, similar exclusions plague the *Carmilla* fandom both online and offline. While

differences in class may be masked by the anonymity afforded by the internet, the expense of CarmillaCon brings economic differences into stark reality. These differences were embodied in the pricing of the passes and the ability to afford the cost of flying to different places, accommodation, and food. This also has racial and geographic implications—western currencies have more purchasing power than currencies from certain countries from Asia, Africa, and South America and due to visa restrictions, it is easier for European, North American, and British citizens to access the world.

Certain racial divisions also made themselves present at CarmillaCon. In the online *Carmilla* fandom, Mattie is a divisive character, hated by some and loved by others. While the actor's physical absence from CarmillaCon was justified by a 40-second video uploaded on the convention's official Twitter handle, her absence from conversation was puzzling. As a fan of color, myself, I too felt a sense of isolation. The fateful organization of the first CarmillaCon while I was in the midst of writing my thesis gave me the opportunity to develop a more well-rounded understanding of the *Carmilla* fandom as an affective community.

Conclusion: Thanks for Watching!

By deriving from multiple sources such as Le Fanu's novella, *Buffy*, *Twilight*, and *Dracula*, the *Carmilla* series does the work of fanfiction. Writers of fanfiction play with the original text by expanding its universe, combining various works into one narrative, and developing multiple complex relationships between different characters. *Carmilla* encourages a sense of belonging in its fans through its format as vlogs and the series' similarity to a fan work. This sense of belonging amongst fans then prompts them to create their own fan works. In the production and consumption of fan works on YouTube, AO3, and Tumblr, positive affects are shared. This give and take of positive affects is central to the creation of a digital affect culture or community of feeling. Affective flows within *Carmilla's* online fandom are influenced by national and racial boundaries, whose presence was reinforced at CarmillaCon. CarmillaCon highlighted how online and offline fandoms both parallel and create one another. As a scholar, I hope to have shown you how the similarity of the *Carmilla* series to fan work creates a lesbian community of feeling in the form of an online fandom that is based on inclusions and exclusions that are also reflected in the offline fandom. As a fan, I hope to have made you want to watch the series.

Through this project I also wanted to contribute to and expand existing scholarship on the representation of lesbian vampires in popular culture, femslash fan studies, discourses around the fan convention and affect theory. As indicated by the scholarship of Andrea Weiss and Barbara Creed, the lesbian vampire is usually written about as a disruption to the patriarchal order because of the challenge she poses to men and her overt sexuality. She is eventually destroyed by the heterosexual male to reinforce the primacy of that order. In chapter one I argue that *Carmilla* subverts that tradition by telling a story in which the lesbian vampire, her lover, and her friends prevail. However, the series also ends up falling into two major traps of the beautiful, cisgender, feminine, white, and rich lesbian vampire and the monstrous

mother. It is easier to accept Carmilla's indiscretions because of her race and class status. The same sympathy is not extended toward Mattie, a black vampire accused of similar crimes as Carmilla.

While scholarship on the femslash fandom focuses primarily on subtextual lesbian relationships like Xena and Gabriel and Swan Queen, little has been written around femslash fandoms featuring canonical lesbians. The presence of affect in fandoms has been described by fan studies scholars such as Louisa Stein. However, such arguments usually involve well known fan cultures such as the *Gossip Girl* (2007-2012) and *Glee* (2009-2015) fandoms. In chapter two I center the affective communities of lesbian fans to address two major gaps in fan studies scholarship: the lack of acknowledgement of online lesbian fandoms formed around media objects headlined by lesbian characters and a lack of discussion about the affects shared by these lesbian fans. I did this by bringing together a number of primary sources such as comments on *Carmilla* episodes and fanfic, tags used by fanfic writers and Tumblr blogs, my own experiences of the *Carmilla* fandom and the work of Katrin Döveling, Anu A. Harju, Denise Sommer, Alexander Cho and Ann Cvetkovich.

Fan and media studies scholars that do speak about the importance of affect in fandoms, such as Louisa Stein, often overlook the role of national and racial boundaries in online fan communities. In chapter three I focused on the globalness of the online *Carmilla* fandom and the position of race and whiteness within the series and its fandom to show how affective flows within lesbian fan communities are often determined by white fans from the West.

While writing about CarmillaCon in chapter four, I came across only Liz Millward's scholarship on the lesbian fan convention. Additionally, there was only a handful of work dedicated to the affective work of the fan convention and the inclusions and exclusions that make themselves explicit in the public space of the Con. I traced a lesbian circuit of fan conventions between ClexaCon, Love Fan Fest, and CarmillaCon based on the travel of the

Carmilla cast and crew, fans, and moderators between these three Cons. Using Millward, I was able to think through the kinds of lesbian spaces created by these Cons on the basis of the people they invite and the fandoms they attract. Katherine Larsen, Lynn Zubernis and Nicolle Lamerichs gave me the vocabulary to understand how the physical layout of the convention space creates both inclusions based on a sense of intimacy and exclusions based on class.

Through my observations at CarmillaCon I was able to analyze how the architecture of the Con encouraged flows of affect, the ways in which shared space led to a sense of comfort and intimacy between the fans themselves and between the fans and the cast and crew, and the class and racial barriers present within the Con. In keeping with the Cons that came before it, CarmillaCon offered three levels of passes. A more expensive pass gave fans more access to the cast and crew via faster entry into panels, separate lines for autographs and photo-ops and the opportunity to have a drink and go to trivia night with the cast. Fans from India, such as myself, would have not been able to afford to attend CarmillaCon if still living at home. Therefore, class exclusions at CarmillaCon had racial implications as well. I could not find any academic work pertaining to the presence of racial relations in the Con space. My exploration of the presence of racial exclusions at CarmillaCon was based on my observations and experiences at the Con and some informal conversations I had with fellow *Carmilla* fans.

This thesis shows how fans actively engage with media objects, that fandoms are formed on the basis of shared affect and that fandoms are more complicated than just transformative spaces for resistance. It also shows that the online and offline worlds of fandom are deeply intertwined. I also wanted to shift the conversation from large well-known fandoms to smaller queerer fandoms. *Carmilla* is an example of how alternative sexualities and gender variance do not have to be used as fodder for the horror genre. If I had more time for this project I would have liked to do a cross-cultural analysis of *Carmilla* in relation to two other lesbian

web series and their fandoms: *Red* (Brazil, Fernando Belo, 2014-present) and *The 'Other Love Story'* (India, Roopa Rao, 2016).

I must confess that I left unsaid the final reason that made me want to write a thesis on *Carmilla*. Through this project, I ultimately hope to provide sources and a framework for future researchers of the *Carmilla* series and its associated fandom as well as those wanting to study other fandoms of contemporary queer web series adaptations of classical novels. Possible projects that this thesis could be used as a springboard for are: the different kinds of work queer web series adaptations (e.g., *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, *Middlemarch*) are doing and if these series encourage similar or different kinds of fandom; why the web series is emerging as a popular format for contemporary queer adaptations of classical novels; and if there is possibly a new genre emerging, one that could be called the “contemporary queer web series adaptation.” *Carmilla* is a good example of this new trend. In this thesis, I have shown that *Carmilla*’s lesbian fan culture is based on the sharing of affect in online and offline spaces, challenges the conception of fandom as lacking national and racial boundaries, and gestures toward a new iteration of lesbian fandom.

Works Cited

Academic Sources

- Ahmed, Sara. "Queer Feelings," in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (London: Routledge, 2004) 144-167.
- Baker, David. "Seduced and Abandoned: Lesbian Vampires on Screen 1968-74." *Erotic Screen and Sound: Culture, Media and Desire* 26, no. 4 (2012): 553-563,
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2012.698035>.
- Brennan, Teresa. "Introduction," in *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004) 1-23.
- Cho, Alexander. "Queer Reverb: Tumble, Affect, Time," in *Networked Affect*, ed. Ken Hills, Susanna Paasonen and Michael Pitt (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015) 43-58.
- Christian, Aymar Jean. "Fandom as Industrial Response: Producing Identity in an Independent Web Series". *Transformative Works and Cultures* 8 (2012): n.p,
<https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2011.0250>.
- Coppa, Francesca. "Introduction: Five Things That Fanfiction Is, and, One Thing It Isn't," in *The Fanfiction Reader: Folk Tales from the Digital Age* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017) 1-18.
- Cousin, John W. *A Short Biographical Dictionary of English Literature* (Frankfurt am Main: Outlook Verlag, 2018), 780.
- Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 64-238.
- Cristofari, Cécile and Matthieu J. Guitton. "Aca-fans and Fan communities: An Operative Framework." *Journal of Consumer Culture* 17, no. 3 (2017): 713-731,
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540515623608>.

- Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 15-181.
- Döveling, Katrin, Anu A. Harji and Denise Sommer. "From Mediatized Emotion to Digital Affect Cultures: New Technologies and Global Flows of Emotion." *Social Media + Society* 4, no. 1 (2018): 1-11, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117743141>.
- Faderman, Lillian. *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: William Morrow, 1981), 342.
- Geraghty, Lincoln. "Class, Capital, and Collecting in Media Fandom," in *The Routledge Companion to Media Fandom*, ed. Melissa A. Click and Suzanne Scott (London and New York: Routledge, 2017) 212-220.
- Gramuglia, Anthony. "The Rise and History of Comic Conventions." *Vocal Geeks*, Vocal. 2017. Web. 20 Feb. 2020.
- Harrington C. Lee and Beilby Denise D. "Global Fandom/Global Fan Studies," in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, ed. Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss and C. Lee Harrington (New York: New York University Press, 2007) 179-198.
- Horak, Laura. "Trans on YouTube: Intimacy, Visibility, Temporality." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (2014): 572-585, <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2815255>.
- Hunter, Mary Ann. "Cultivating the Art of Safe Space." *Research in Drama Education* 13, no. 1 (2008): 5-21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569780701825195>.
- Jenkins, Henry. "Get a Life!: Fans, Poachers, Nerds," *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2007) 9-50.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 13-96.

- Lamerichs, Nicolle. "Embodied Fantasy: The Affective Space of Anime Conventions," in *The Ashgate research companion to fan cultures*, ed. Linda Duits, Koos Zwaan and Stijn Reijnders (London and New York: Routledge, 2016) 263-275.
- Larsen, Katherine and Lynn Zubernis. "Introduction," in *Fan Culture: Theory/Practice*, ed. Katherine Larsen and Lynn Zubernis (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012) 1-13.
- Larsen, Katherine and Lynn Zubernis. "Introduction," in *Fandom At The Crossroads: Celebration, Shame and Fan/Producer Relationships* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012) 1-8.
- Larsen, Katherine and Lynn Zubernis. "Lost in Space: Participatory Fandom and the Negotiation of Fan Spaces," in *Fandom At The Crossroads: Celebration, Shame and Fan/Producer Relationships* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012) 16-35.
- Le Fanu, Joseph Sheridan. *Carmilla* (Toulon: Editions Soleil, 2014 Anniversary Edition), 12.
- Lothian, Alexis et al. "Yearning Void and Infinite Potential: Online Slash Fandom as Queer Female Space." *English Language Notes* 45, no. 2 (2007): 103-111,
<https://doi.org/10.1215/00138282-45.2.103>.
- Mathew Kerri L. and Devon Christopher Adams. "I Love Your Book, but I Love My Version More: Fanfiction in the English Language Arts Classroom." *The Alan Review* (2009): 35-40, <https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/v36n3/pdf/mathew.pdf>.
- Millward, Liz. "New Xenaland: Lesbian place making, the Xenaverse, and Aotearoa New Zealand." *Gender, Place & Culture* 14.4 (2007): 427-443,
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09663690701439736>.
- Palmer, Paulina. *Lesbian Gothic: Transgressive fictions* (London and New York: Cassell, 1999), 10.

- Parker, Sarah. "'The Darkness is the Closet in Which Your Lover Roots Her Heart': Lesbians, Desire and the Gothic Genre." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 9.2 (2008): 4-19, <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol9/iss2/2>.
- Riley, Olivia. *Archive of Our Own and the Gift Culture of Fanfiction*. MA Thesis, University of Minnesota, 2015.
- Russo, Julie Levin. "Textual Orientation: Queer Female Fandom Online," in *The Routledge Companion to Media and Gender*, ed. Cynthia Carter, Linda Steiner and Lisa McLaughlin (New York: Routledge, 2014) 450-460.
- Samutina, Natalia. "Fan fiction as World-Building: Transformative Reception in Crossover Writing." *Journal of Media and Culture Studies* 30.4 (2016): 433-450, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2016.1141863>.
- Sandvoss, Cornel. "The Death of the Reader?" in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World* (New York: New York University Press, 2007) 19-33.
- Scott, Suzanne. "Introduction: Make Fandom Great Again," in *Fake Geek Girls: Fandom, Gender, and the Convergence Culture Industry* (New York: New York University Press 2019) 1-23.
- Stanfill, Mel. "Fandom's Normativity: Assuming and Recruiting the Socially Dominant Fan Subject," *Exploiting Fandom: How the Media Industry Seeks to Manipulate Fans* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018) 22-25.
- Stanfill, Mel. "Fans of Color in Femslash." *Transformative Works and Cultures* 29 (2019): n.p, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2019.1528>.
- Stein, Louisa Ellen. *Millennial Fandom: Television Audiences in the Transmedia Age* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015), 156-161.

Weiss, Andrea. *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 84-92.

Williams, Anne. *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), 8-22.

Williams, Linda. "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess." *Film Quarterly* 44.4 (1991): 2-13, DOI: [10.2307/1212758](https://doi.org/10.2307/1212758).

Wise, Michelle Denise. "*I am a Monster, Just Like She Said*": *Monstrous Lesbians in Contemporary Gothic Film*. PhD Dissertation, Middle Tennessee State University, 2016.

Zimmerman, Bonnie. "Daughters of Darkness: Lesbian Vampires." *Jump Cut* 24-25 (1981): 23-24, <https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC24-25folder/LesbianVampires.html>.

Fan Works

"FAQ's." *ClexaCon*. ClexaCon LLC, 2017. Web. 13 Feb. 2020, <https://clexacon.com/about/faqs/>

"Global Creampuff Domination." *Carmilla Feels HQ (Twitter)*, September 6, 2016. Screenshot by Author.

"History." *WisCon*. SF3 – Society for the Furtherance & Study of Fantasy & Science Fiction, 2016. Web. 9 March. 2020, <http://wiscon.net/about/history/>

"Matska Belmonde." *Carmilla Wiki*. Google Images, https://carmilla.fandom.com/wiki/Matska_Belmonde

"Mission Statement." *CarmillaCon*. Ask Ware Productions LLC, 2019. Web. 13 Feb. 2020. <https://www.carmillacon.com/mission-statement>

“Vision.” *ClexaCon*. ClexaCon LLC, 2017. Web. 13 Feb. 2020,

<https://clexacon.com/about/vision/#>

@Carmilla: The Series Reviewed. “Carmilla X Buffy the Vampire Slayer 5/∞,” 2 May 2015,

<https://carmilla-reviewed.tumblr.com/tagged/carmilla-x-btvs>

@CarmillaCon. “Special Message from #SophiaWalker #CarmillaCon.” Twitter, June 19,

2019, 12:03 p.m., <https://twitter.com/CarmillaCon/status/1141375907237683200>

@gayladyfarts. “Are Sophia Walker and Shannon kook gonna be there as well.” Twitter,

February 4, 2019, 5:25 p.m.,

<https://twitter.com/gayladyfarts/status/1092549849487233026>

@hatterwithaheart. “Hello, I will be Danny Lawrence’s lawyer today. This is my argument

for Danny killing Maddie...,” n.d., <https://hatterwithaheart.tumblr.com/>

@HotLadyPants. “If you’d like to help with subtitles...,” 7 Jan 2015,

<https://hotladypants.tumblr.com/post/107457242622/creampuffs-from-everywhere>

@qualitytrashmaterial. “The amount of people that still hate Danny Lawrence...,” 30 Dec

2016, <https://qualitytrashmaterial.tumblr.com/post/155170365333/the-amount-of-people-that-still-here-danny>

Anderson, Porter. “Industry Notes: Canada’s Kids Can Press to Adapt YouTube ‘Carmilla’

Series into YA Book.” *Publishing Perspectives*, June 27, 2017,

<https://publishingperspectives.com/2017/06/canada-kids-can-press-carmilla-series-book/>.

Anna Baked. Comment on “Disorientation (Carmilla S1 E1)”. KindaTV, 2015,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4QzRfvkJZ4&list=PLbvYWjKFvS5rX2yv-k5AJ8oxPoZ9zHcpe>

BlancheNeigefan. Comment on “Co-Existence (Carmilla S2 E30)”. KindaTV, 2017,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsqJ8lwar3w>

Dalton, Logan. "How Dear You Are to Me: Ranking *Carmilla*'s 10 Most Adorable Moments."

The Mary Sue, September 15, 2016,

<https://www.buzzfeed.com/candicedarden/reasons-why-carmilla-is-underrated>

Darden, Candice. "20 Reasons "Carmilla" Is The Best Show You're Not Watching." *BuzzFeed*,

June 22, 2015, [https://www.themarysue.com/how-dear-you-are-to-me-ranking-](https://www.themarysue.com/how-dear-you-are-to-me-ranking-carmillas-10-most-adorable-moments/)

[carmillas-10-most-adorable-moments/](https://www.themarysue.com/how-dear-you-are-to-me-ranking-carmillas-10-most-adorable-moments/)

David Dobrik, "we broke up," YouTube video, 6:19, posted June 5, 2018,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2HytHu5VBI&t=15s>.

Diaz, Kathryn. "Moving Us Forward: 'Carmilla' the Series." *BitchFlicks*, December 12, 2014,

[http://www.btchflicks.com/2014/12/moving-us-forwards-carmilla-the-](http://www.btchflicks.com/2014/12/moving-us-forwards-carmilla-the-series.html#.XnzzktNKhQI)

[series.html#.XnzzktNKhQI](http://www.btchflicks.com/2014/12/moving-us-forwards-carmilla-the-series.html#.XnzzktNKhQI)

LovelyLies16. Comment on "Co-Existence (Carmilla S2 E30)". KindaTV, 2016,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0D5ngRmdgAI>

mightywiz. Comment on "The Gardener, and a student". MysteriousAnonymous, 27 Sept

2016, 11:32 a.m., <https://archiveofourown.org/works/8146859/chapters/18671003>

Newman, Kim. "Sheridan Le Fanu's gothic spirit lives on." *The Guardian*, August 28, 2014,

[https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2014/aug/28/sheridan-le-fanu-two-](https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2014/aug/28/sheridan-le-fanu-two-centuries-birth-vampire-ghost-stories)

[centuries-birth-vampire-ghost-stories](https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2014/aug/28/sheridan-le-fanu-two-centuries-birth-vampire-ghost-stories)

Now deleted comment on "Co-Existence (Carmilla S2 E30)". KindaTV, 2016,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsqJ8lwar3w>

Piccoli, Dana. "8 Reasons Why You Should Watch "Carmilla" Now!" *AfterEllen*, October 8,

2014, [https://www.afterellen.com/video/228802-8-reasons-why-you-should-watch-](https://www.afterellen.com/video/228802-8-reasons-why-you-should-watch-carmilla-now)

[carmilla-now](https://www.afterellen.com/video/228802-8-reasons-why-you-should-watch-carmilla-now)

Savannah Raaye. Comment on "Co-Existence (Carmilla S2 E30)". KindaTV, 2016,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsqJ8lwar3w>

SDagoth. Comment on “Co-Existence (Carmilla S2 E30)”. KindaTV, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsqJ8lwar3w>

Simpson, Ellen Jordan Hall, Stephanie Ouaknine and Melanie Windle, panelists. Creators panel discussion. Dominion Hall, 5 Oct. 2019, Sheraton Centre, Toronto, ON.

SpicyTaco. Comment on “Still Falling For You”. standardusername, 19 Feb 2019, 6:14 p.m., <https://archiveofourown.org/works/17330351/chapters/42126311#workskin>

Sumithri Venketasubramanian. Comment on “No Heroics (Carmilla S2 E15)”. KindaTV, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vHhZBW2lto>

The DID System of A. Comment on “Co-Existence (Carmilla S2 E30)”. KindaTV, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0D5ngRmdgAI>

The Most Curious Thing. Comment on “Co-Existence (Carmilla S2 E30)”. KindaTV, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsqJ8lwar3w>

Tickets.” *CarmillaCon*. Ask Ware Productions LLC, 2019. Web. 13 Feb. 2020, <https://www.carmillacon.com/tickets>

vanKampen, Stephanie. “How a little Canadian web series about a lesbian vampire became a worldwide hit.” *CBC*, October, 24, 2017, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/entertainment/carmilla-web-series-movie-1.4367622>

Weekes, Princess. “Mattie Belmonde: The Dark Horse of *Carmilla*.” *The Mary Sue*, October 23, 2017, <https://www.themarysue.com/mattie-belmonde-the-dark-horse-of-carmilla/>

Zimmerman, Amy. “The Feminist Making Vampires Gay Again,” *The Daily Beast*, October 10, 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-feminists-making-vampires-gay-again>

Stamp, Nicole, Sharon Belle and Matt O’Connor, panelists. Adonis Hunt: The Aftermath panel discussion. Dominion Hall, 6 Oct. 2019, Sheraton Centre, Toronto, ON.

Negovanlis, Natasha, Elise Bauman, Kaitlyn Alexander, Annie Briggs, Aaron Chartrand,
Nicole Stamp, Sharon Belle and Matt O'Connor, panelists. Cast panel discussion.
Dominion Hall, 5 Oct. 2019, Sheraton Centre, Toronto, ON.