

Carmilla: From Lesbian Vampire to Lesbian and a Vampire

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Abstract: *Carmilla is a classic piece of vampire literature and one of the first piece of queer vampire media. Over the years and adaptations, the character in with the story gets its name has gone through a change, from being a lesbian vampire to a character who is both a lesbian and a vampire.*

“You are mine; you shall be mine; you and I are one forever.”

Before we had *Twilight*, *Vampire Academy*, *Buffy* or even *Dracula* we had one vampire story that stood above the rest. We had *Carmilla* by Sheridan Le Fanu who, like the future *Dracula* writing author, was an Irish author born 1814. His gothic tale first came to public viewing in 1871 and while only 108 pages long would find its way into the heart of vampiric lore for hundreds of years to come. It is what many consider the first queer vampire story.

Carmilla is the story of Laura a young woman who lives an isolated life far from anyone in her castle like home, until one day meeting a mysterious woman by the name of Carmilla. Carmilla dark presence lures in the lonely Laura, but does she want to hurt Laura, control Laura, love Laura or a combination of the three? Like many vampire stories the connection between the leads is soaked in darkness, seduction, and blood, and this is why this story is still so popular in the modern day. But it is a story that has changed over time, and the views on sapphic relationships change too.

The original understanding of the story links the idea of being sapphic and being a vampire together completely. Many read it as being a vampire= evil so also being sapphic= evil, but with new adaptations of re-imagining of the story that no longer the case. While some versions still show Carmilla as evil and always a vampire and sapphic, no longer is it so connected. She is a vampire who happens to be sapphic. The best case of this is with the Canadian web series of the same name that ran from 2014-2016.

This series that can be found on full on YouTube ran for three seasons and takes the story of Carmilla and put it in a modern collage setting. The creators of the show found a way to take both leads and grow them into more than just predator and prey which they fell into in the original story and many of the early adaptations. Laura has more agency in the story than the original where even though she is the narrator the actions happen around and too her, but very rarely does she have any direct cause. While Carmilla gets to have more of a tragedy to herself and the show also lets her show a caring side that in the novel is only ever shown to be a falsity she is using to trick Laura.

But the biggest change made in the web series is that there is no doubt that there is true romantic love between Carmilla and Laura. The novel can be left up to the reader if Carmilla really loved Laura at all or truly only saw her as her next victim, but the series wanted to show a real relationship between the two and it grows the story even more. The two of them are given a chance to grow and be more together and a part in this series. With changing politics and gender roles, the story has room to change and grow while keeping the allure that the original had and still has today.

The *Carmilla* web series was a chance to give these classic characters be more than a trope and become full characters that can be relatable eve over 100 years since the original publication, and yes while Carmilla can be seen as the start of lesbian vampire trope does not change my point. It, like vampires, gives them a chance at a second life. Web *Carmilla* is not the last adaption of the story at 2019 British film version just being example of one that came after the end of the shows run and even the series itself has had a book and movie come out as well. The story is addictive and draws people in so more new adaptations and re imaginings will be made. Not all versions of *Carmilla* will be perfect or even good, but they all help her take steps

farther and farther away from just being a trope. Once just a lesbian vampire now she is a lesbian and a vampire.

References

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