

LUNA

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Bachelor Thesis
Incarnations of Dracula

Gjenspeilinger av Dracula

Lektorutdanning i språkfag med engelsk som Fag I

2017

English summary:

Title: Incarnations of Dracula: A Meeting of Monsters from the East and the West	
Author: Ragnhild Jønsberg Aspeggen	
Year: 2017	Pages: 26
Keywords: Dracula, Castlevania, monsters, culture, literature	
Summary: An exploration of the function of monsters within the culture that produced them, and how a well known monster archetype changes in form and function when exported to a vastly foreign culture. By looking at Bram Stoker's <i>Dracula</i> and Konami's video game series <i>Castlevania</i> , I discover the cultural differences and similarities, and the effects of time on monster culture.	

Norsk sammendrag:

Tittel: Gjenspeilinger av Dracula: et møte mellom monstre fra øst og vest	
Forfatter: Ragnhild Jønsberg Aspeggen	
År: 2017	Sider: 26
Emneord: Dracula, Castlevania, monstre, kultur, litteratur	
Sammendrag: En utforsking av monstrets funksjon innenfor den kulturen som skapte de, og av hvordan godt kjente arketyper av monstre endrer form og funksjon når de blir eksportert til en vidt forskjellig kultur. Ved å se på Bram Stokers <i>Dracula</i> og Konamis videospill serie <i>Castlevania</i> oppdager jeg de kulturelle forskjellene og likhetene, og hvordan tid påvirker monsterkultur.	

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I wish to thank my professor and supervisor, Heidi Silje Moen, for her invaluable encouragement and advice on this project, and Eva Kuklínková, for remaining a stalwart supporter and honest critic of all my writing.

INCARNATIONS OF DRACULA

A Meeting of Monsters from the East and the West

“Like a letter on a page, the monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again” (Cohen, 1996, p.4).

Introduction

The above quote from Jeffery Jerome Cohen gives a succinct description of the function of monsters. The *function* of monsters, and how their function correlates to their *portrayal*, is what I am interested in exploring in this thesis, the monster’s actions, and the *reactions* it provokes from its surroundings. A reoccurring trope in Gothic fiction is the protagonist’s horror at encountering something decidedly ‘abhuman’ (Hurley, 2004, pp. 3-20). This visceral reaction outlines the borders between what is acceptable and what is not within the text’s culture (Hurley, 2002, p. 204).

I will do this by looking at one monster archetype—by which I mean a well-established, recognisable creature—The monster archetype in question is, of course, Dracula. Dracula first appeared as the titular character in Bram Stoker’s famous novel from 1897, and has since inspired literature, cinema and other media throughout the world. *Dracula* has left behind an immense legacy. My question is, how does a classic monster change in form and function when it is exported to a distinctly foreign culture?

In addition to talking about Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* itself, I have chosen to focus on the Japanese video game series by Konami, *Castlevania*, as this series borrows heavily from *Dracula*. While retaining much of the Gothic imagery from Bram Stoker’s novel, *Castlevania* treats many of the original elements of *Dracula* in a way that is unique to Japanese culture.

To better understand the Japanese’s relation to the western vampire tropes, it is important to first have a look at the history of vampires in both parts of the world. By understanding how the origins and functions of the vampire differs between the East and the

West, I can better identify the significance in how *Dracula* and *Castlevania* compares and contrasts.



Le Vampire, lithographie de R. de Moraine, tirée des Tribunaux secrets.
Figure 1: A suspected vampire

The Western Vampire

The vampire as we know it dates back to the Late Middle Ages, and originated in Eastern Europe. This is apparent in the word's etymology; 'vampire' is Slavonic, and variations of the word are found throughout the Slavic languages (River, 2014, p. 88).

The vampire was known to rise from the grave and suck the blood or life energy from living beings, by biting or attacking the victims in other ways. These attacks were often lethal, and it was said that the vampire could spread pestilence that would kill people who had not been directly victimised (River. p. 88). The people of medieval Europe had

many superstitious beliefs centred around the dead, and harboured a strong fear of corpses, believing them capable of harming the living (Little, 2016).

Becky Little of National Geographic attributes many of the vampire's traits to a lack of medical knowledge. She writes, 'as a corpse's skin shrinks, its teeth and fingernails can appear to have grown longer. And as internal organs break down, a dark "purge fluid" can leak out of the nose and mouth. People unfamiliar with this process would interpret this fluid to be blood and suspect that the corpse had been drinking it from the living' (2016, 3rd paragraph).

Disease was also believed to be the work of vampires, as people did not understand how diseases were spread. Blaming vampires, and subsequently performing the necessary rituals to destroy the vampire, was a way for them to gain a sense of control over the disease. Unsurprisingly, anti-vampire efforts increased in times of plague (Little, 2016).

The above observations explain three major elements of popular vampire lore; a thirst for blood, activity after death, and the spreading of disease much like the spreading of vampirism. The Eastern European vampire of the Late Middle Ages is a recognisable start to what would eventually become *Dracula*.

A score of contemporary works treat the living dead as a romantic idea about eternal love. For example, there is Francis Ford Coppola's movie adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which makes multiple changes to Stoker's original story in order to further a love

affair between Mina and Dracula, and carries the tagline ‘Love never dies’ (Coppola & Hart, 1992). I believe the notion of eternal love has helped vampires retain their popularity even today.

The romanticisation and sexualisation of vampires was, however, nothing new even at the time of *Dracula*’s publication. In 1871 - 72, Joseph Le Fanu published his Gothic novella *Carmilla*. It follows Laura, who falls victim to a female vampire that exclusively preys upon women. Carmilla shares many of Dracula’s strengths and weaknesses, such as immortality, sleeping within a tomb, and being killed by having a stake driven through her heart.

The novella focuses on the growing friendship between Carmilla and Laura. Carmilla goes as far as making romantic advances towards her, and Laura is torn between feelings of disgust and infatuation. Fred Botting comments on this in *Gothic*: ‘Carmilla’s unnatural desires are signalled in her choice of females as her victims and the alluring as well as disturbing effects she has on them’ (1996, p. 145). What Botting suggests is that Carmilla’s apparent homosexuality is a symptom of her monstrousness. To the 19th century reader, her lust for blood is made all the more shocking and obscene because of her attraction to women. In the end, Laura is saved from death by a man whose daughter had previously fallen prey to Carmilla.



Figure 2: Carmilla would bite her victim’s breast, further sexualising the vampire’s kiss

Symbolically, the man saves Laura from homosexuality by the penetration of Carmilla with a stake (Botting, 1996, p. 144).

Dracula borrows a number of elements from *Carmilla*, and while it shies away from the theme of homosexuality for the most part, sexuality is one of *Dracula*’s main themes. Later on I will discuss sexuality and gender roles in greater detail, but for now we move on to the curious vampiric creatures of the East.

Vampires in Japan

More than other Asian countries, Japanese folklore is lacking in monsters that we might recognise as vampires. Some claim the oldest creature from Japanese folklore that may fit the

bill is the Kappa, which frequently appeared in writing throughout the 18th Century (The Free Dictionary, n.d.). Older Japanese folklore was heavily inspired by Chinese folklore, but the Kappa appears to be a creature unique to Japan (Foster, 2008, pp. 45-46).

Kappa are described to be scaly and reptilian, about the size of a ten-year-old child. They speak with a human voice, and walk upright on two legs. A bowl-shaped indent at the top of their head carries water, which allows them to leave their usual habitats of ponds or rivers. They will steal crops and drag cattle into the water in order to drink their blood. In the case of an encounter with a human they will invite him to wrestle. As long as the Kappa carries water, he has many times the strength of a human warrior, but he is also polite to a fault; bow to the Kappa and the Kappa will bow back, pouring out the water and losing his strength (Argenti, 2014).

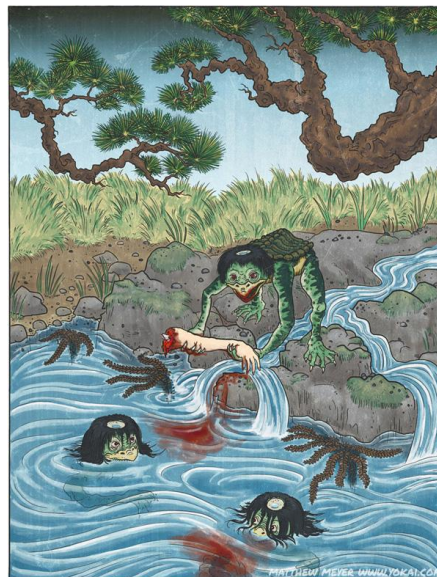


Figure 3: The bloodthirsty Kappa

Stories of the Kappa were used to ward children away from rivers and watersides, under threat of being dragged into the water by this bloodthirsty creature. The Kappa has in later times become more of a figure of amusement, appearing as a mascot for a famous brand of sake, in amusement parks and children’s television series. While the Kappa once served as a guide of conduct during the harsh, early years of Japanese history, modern life no longer has the same demand for the Kappa’s guidelines, and so it has greatly decreased in its menace (Argenti, 2014).

The western vampire has later become popular in contemporary Japanese entertainment, and is featured in countless anime and manga (Japanese animated films/series and graphic novels, respectively). Unlike the Kappa, these are human appearance, mainly distinguished by their fangs and their behaviour.



Figure 4: The less bloodthirsty Kappa

Fintan Monaghan of the Escapist Magazine suggests, ‘the very fact that the vampire was a foreign import was the key to its original surge in popularity.’ By this, he suggests the fear of the western vampire is interlinked with and

strengthened by a fear of foreigners. He writes that, if the Japanese only desired a blood-sucking horror, they already had the Kappa, and if they wished for a shape-shifting, seductive fiend, they had the Cat of Nameshiba, who changed into the shape of a concubine and nightly drank the blood of a prince. Even with plenty of vampiric creatures of their own, the Japanese were attracted to the ‘shady yet charismatic European aristocrat’ (Monaghn, 2014).

It was one specific work of fiction that brought the western vampire to Japan, and which started the vampire craze. The 1930s was a time of extreme xenophobia and militarism in Japan, and just then they saw the timely publication of Seishi Yokomizo’s *Dokuro-Kengyu*, translating to *The Death’s-Head Stranger* in English. This tale borrows elements of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, and features the mysterious character Shiranui. Monaghn suggests the character of Shiranui is based upon real historical figure Amakusa Shiro, who in the 17th century lead a Christian rebellion in Japan. In this story, Shiranui transforms the Shogun’s daughter into a vampire. Montaghn writes that vampirism here represents the invasion of western culture, which with vampirism could spread like a disease. This, in a time when the Japanese Shogunate worried about the encroaching Christian missionaries, solidified the vampire as a symbol of fear of the foreign, a function which would have been impossible for the Kappa or the Cat of Nameshiba (Monaghn, 2014).

Vampires were further explored during the post-war period. Ryo Hanmura wrote about a sexually transmitted virus brought in from abroad, that grants immortality to the afflicted, as well as a thirst for blood. This 1972 novel, *Ishi No Ketsumyaku*, or *Veins of the Rock* in English, discusses the horrors and humiliation that come with war and occupation, but also the positives of foreign ideas and technology (Monaghn, 2014).

This function of the vampire as a sexually immoral creature is so far the most obvious overlap with the vampire’s function in western society. While no explicit sexual intercourse is necessary for the transmission of vampirism in *Dracula*, there are overtly sexual themes in the majority of western vampire literature. Then again, was not Count Dracula also a foreigner in Bram Stoker’s novel? The sole reason he becomes a threat to the main characters is that he has decided to make the move from Transylvania to London, in search of new prey.

Bram Stoker portrays the natives of Dracula’s homeland to be rural and superstitious people, though not necessarily in a derogatory way. There is no direct fear of Romanian culture invading England, nor is there a major conflict of faith. Fred Botting reads *Dracula* as a friction between the East and West of Europe (1996). Doctor Van Helsing suggests the Count is a product of the different geology and chemistry of his homeland, but I see little

evidence in *Dracula* that points to a xenophobic agenda, particularly with the strong character of Van Helsing at the forefront of the fight against the Count, the characters' continued admiration of the Romanian geography and cooking, and the mostly pleasant and helpful foreigners that Jonathan encounters on his trip.

The function of the vampire in Japan as a dangerous foreigner remains. The contemporary Japanese vampire is often seen in Victorian fashion, living an extravagant lifestyle and obsessing over nobility or purity of bloodlines. This is seen in Japanese films and series such as *Hellsing*, *Vampire Knight*, *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure* and *Vampire Hunter D*, to name only a few well recognised and popular titles. Meanwhile, contemporary western vampires are more frequently portrayed in modern clothing, living mostly common mortal lives, as seen in works such as *Let the Right One In*, *Being Human*, *True Blood* or *What We Do in the Shadows*. While vampires both in the East and the West have become more diverse in their portrayal, vampires in Japanese productions tends to retain more elements of the vampire's original function as the western stranger.

Bram Stoker's *Dracula*

I have already mentioned *Dracula* in passing, and it is time to delve deeper into detail, to examine *Dracula* not only as a junction of vampire lore but as a product of its own culture and time of conception. It was originally published in the UK in year 1897, and has become a staple of Gothic horror.

Kelly Hurley, in her essay on British Gothic fiction, describes the genre thusly: 'The Gothic is rightly, if partially, understood as a cyclical genre that reemerges in times of



Figure 5: Bela Lugosi in *Dracula* (1931)

cultural stress in order to negotiate anxieties for its readership by working through them in displaced (sometimes supernaturalized) form' (Hurley, 2002, p. 194). What Hurley suggests is, much like how *Lord of the Rings* emerged as a fantastic escape from the harrowing time of World War 1, Gothic fiction is a way for society to deal with difficult times. Unlike the fantasy genre, however, Gothic delves into the dark, the morbid and the terrifying, rather than offering a distraction.

For example, Hurley attributes the affinity for body horror and *abhumanness* in Gothic literature partly to the theories of Charles Darwin that came about in the 19th century. The suggestion that humans were animals, evolved from apes who had in turn evolved from amphibian-like creatures, tore down the delusions of species as a set, unchangeable thing. ‘The theory of evolution described the human body not as an integral wholeness, but as a kind of Frankenstein monster, patched together from the different animal forms the human species had inhabited during various phases of its evolutionary history’ (Hurley, 2002, p. 195). Not only was this idea distressing to society, but also blasphemous.

In Gothic fiction, the body is a short way off from transforming, metamorphosing, devolving or liquefying, either by science or the supernatural, and always to the shock and horror of the protagonist (Hurley, 2002). This idea of what I might call the Darwinian horror is apparent throughout *Dracula*, not only in the Count’s abilities, but in how the other characters go about analysing and documenting the Count’s existence. Late in the book, Van Helsing in his broken English shares his idea on how the Count may have come about:

‘With this one, all the forces of nature that are occult and deep and strong must have worked together in some wondrous way. The very place, where he have been alive, Undead for all these centuries, is full of strangeness of the geologic and chemical world... Doubtless, there is something magnetic or electric in some of these combinations of occult forces which work for physical life in strange way, and in himself were from the first some great qualities’ (Stoker, 1897, p. 361). What Van Helsing suggests is that Dracula is a product of evolution, and that he has evolved differently from other human beings due to the qualities inherent in his homeland. This aligns with the idea of the Darwinian horror.

They also discuss the Count’s brain as a ‘child-brain’, and a criminal mind with the undeveloped, selfish traits of a criminal. Many of the Count’s traits are, on a smaller scale, mirrored in the asylum inmate Renfield, who frequently offers insight into the Count’s affairs for the main characters. Renfield, in his lust for life by the consumption of living creatures, constructs a food chain of flies, spiders and sparrows, which in his mind will eventually lead up to human beings, perhaps in a perverted version of Darwin’s theory of evolution (Botting, 1996).

Through the character of Van Helsing, science and religion is allowed to unite in battling this ancient evil. Through Jonathan Harker, John Seward, Arthur Holmwood and Quincy Morris, the modern gentleman is allowed to temporarily revert to an image of primal masculinity (Botting, 1996). Meanwhile, the women of *Dracula* go through a somewhat different transformation.



Figure 6: Coppola exchanges sexual undertones for sexual overtones in his 1992 movie adaptation. Lucy is assaulted by Dracula in a sexually aggressive, *abhuman* shape.

The New Woman was a growing idea at the time. New Women wanted the opportunity to make their own living outside the protection of men, they wanted to discuss sexuality and venereal diseases openly, and they wanted to have sex outside of marriage. The women under Dracula's influence display traits evocative of the New Woman, or at least in society's perception of New Women as wanton and provocative (Botting, 1996). Lucy is restored from this state of unacceptable wantonness by what Botting describes as 'phallic law' (1996, p. 151), when Arthur penetrates her with the wooden stake. Likewise, Mina is restored by the impalement and dismemberment of Dracula, who is the perverted mirror image of the perfect Victorian gentleman (Botting, 1996).

A strongly evocative scene in the novel is what Van Helsing refers to as 'the Vampire's baptism of blood' (Stoker, p.364). This exchange of fluids between Mina and the Count is just short of sexual intercourse. Blood is another way of transmitting sexual diseases, and forcing Mina to drink of Dracula's blood can be interpreted as overtly sexual without the author's need of rendering explicit sex or rape. It is after this scene that her purity comes into question, just as if she has been sexually violated. While the male characters pity and support her, her accidental branding by the communion wafer, suggests that even as a victim she is being punished. It matters not whether she was violated or if she participated willingly; she is branded as impure and rejected by God (Stoker, p. 335).

The condemnation of female sexuality is further emphasised by how the transformed women all act lusty and shameless when under Dracula's influence. Evil is represented by

vampirism and overt sexuality, and good is represented by purity and Christianity. A fall from religion, even through forcible transformation, turn the women into debauched temptresses. This commentary on sexuality, however, is reserved for the women. While there are some moments that can be read as implying homosexual desires on the Count's part, such as him claiming Jonathan Harker for himself, this is greatly underplayed in comparison to the women's transformation. The closest idea we have to a male transformation is that of Renfield, who appears to be enthralled to serve Dracula as anything but a food source. The given evidence suggests Dracula prefers female victims.

Considering Renfield as Dracula's only male victim, and a thrall at that rather than a food source, we see a distinct lack of sexual behaviour. Renfield instead suffers insanity. Customs at the time of publication demanded the control of female sexuality, but men required a different control—that of their mental faculties. Vampirism perverts both of the sexes, but it does so in accordance to what society dictates is proper and improper behaviour for men and women, and thus it has to pervert the men and women differently. An overtly sexual man is not as horrifying as an insane man. Likewise, an insane woman is not as horrifying as an overtly sexual woman. Female hysteria would not have surprised anyone.

The only overtly sexual actions displayed by a male in the novel is possibly when Dracula forces his blood upon Mina, an act that can be compared to non-explicit rape. We can easily see how this scene may be the inspiration for Ryu Hanmura's *Ishi No Ketsumyaku*, where vampirism is a sexually transmitted virus.

It is worth noting that Mina is portrayed, even before her Vampire's baptism, as more than the passive, domestic angel that was the ideal for women in Victorian times. She is a working woman, she aids in transcribing the letters and diaries that make up the novel, and she provides many of the essential breakthroughs necessary in their hunt for Dracula. As a Victorian woman goes, she is far from old fashioned, to the benefit of the men. Van Helsing describes her as having the brain of a man and the heart of a woman; her proactive behaviour, even when helpful, is seen as inherently masculine, and we are not told whether she is allowed to retain the active side of her personality after Dracula's death and the birth of her son.

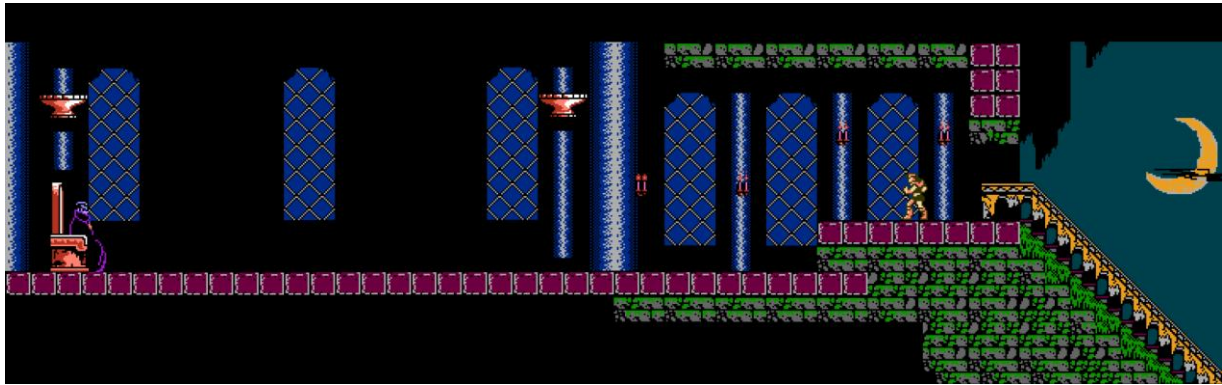


Figure 7: Richter on his way to face Dracula in *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse* (1989)

Castlevania

Castlevania is a Japanese property that not only borrows from *Dracula*, but also from the sources that inspired *Dracula*. Konami released the first game in the series, titled only *Castlevania*, in 1986. It came out in North America and Europe a short time later (GameFAQ, n.d.).

The premise of the series is simple. You are a vampire hunter, and your task is to traverse the labyrinthine castle that is Castlevania, to defeat Dracula's servants and finally to reach and annihilate Dracula himself. Slight variations to this formula appear in every instalment of the series.

From the very start, *Castlevania* utilised a plethora of tropes from classic western horror, borrowing from Hammer Horror, Universal Movies and Gothic literature. The player is faced with enemies that are reimaginings of Frankenstein's monster, the Swamp Thing, the Mummy, Mr. Hyde, the Grim Reaper and other monstrosities, all in service of their Lord and Master, Count Dracula.

Today the series includes well over 30 titles, and a storyline that spans nearly a millennium, from *Castlevania: Lament of Innocence*, which place in 1094, to *Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow*, which takes place in 2036 (Moby Games, n.d). It is worth noting that in regards to their storylines, the games were not published in chronological



Figure 8: Castlevania's Dracula

order. Because of the very large library of games in the series, I will be making a selection of titles to talk about in closer detail. The Count himself will be our point of departure.

We meet Dracula at his youngest in *Castlevania: Lament of Innocence*, set in the 11th century. He starts out as a mortal human by the name of Mathias Cronqvist. This name is likely a reference to Matthias Corvinus, the King of Hungary, to whom Vlad the Impaler was a vassal (Castlevania Wiki, n.d.). Mathias Cronqvist was good friends with Leon Belmont—protagonists of the *Castlevania* series are generally Belmont family members and descendants of Leon—and was a well educated man far ahead of his times, but his fate was much similar to that of Dracula in Francis Ford Coppola’s movie adaptation.

His first wife, Elisabetha, died while he was away on a crusade against heathens. Mathias blamed God for taking away what mattered most to him. He began the search for immortality, his way of defying God’s decrees. Mathias used an ancient relic to turn himself into a vampire, and through betraying his friend Leon he was able to amass incredible power (Castlevania: Lament of Innocence, 2005).

Mathias still had more misfortune ahead of him, however. Between the 12th and 15th century he built Castlevania, a magical castle in the province of Walachia, and sanctuary to humans and other beings who had also forsaken or been forsaken by God. It was then he met Lisa. She was drawn to him for his knowledge of medicine and technology, and reminded him of Elisabetha. They fell madly in love, and she gave him a half-vampire son by the name of Adrian.

Lisa’s prowess in medicine was however misinterpreted by the people of Walachia as witchcraft, and she was arrested and crucified. Again, Mathias failed to be present and intervene with the death of his wife, for the execution took place during daylight hours. This was what finally drove him to madness, and he took the name Dracula Vlad Țepeș, swearing his revenge not only against God, but against all of mankind (Castlevania Wiki, n.d.).

With armies called up from hell, Dracula crushed the forces of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Entire countries were conquered. In 1476, Trevor Belmont, descendant of Leon Belmont, teamed up with Adrian, son of Dracula,



Figure 9: Adrian, known as Alucard

and the sorceress Sypha Belnades, to invade Castlevania and destroy Dracula. They defeated him, but not before Dracula could cast a curse over all of Walachia. The curse affected the minds of Walachia's people, causing them to pillage and lay waste to the land (Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse, 1989). The curse alludes to the vampire's historical connection to disease, but rather than a disease of the flesh it is a disease of the mind.

It was the first of several curses Dracula was to cast upon the land, and more importantly it was also his first death, though not his last. As Cohen writes, 'the revenant by definition returns' (1996, p. 5). Dracula returns every century thereafter, to once again spread his evil across the land. Richter Belmont, descendant of Trevor Belmont, is one of the many Belmonts to face a resurrection of Dracula.

When Richter tells Dracula that he does not belong in this world, Dracula replies thusly, 'it was not by my hand that I'm once again given flesh. I was called here by humans who wish to pay me tribute' (Castlevania: Symphony of the Night, 1997). Not only does the monster return, but it is humans who are continuously resurrecting him. This is seen first-hand in several later games, where humans are actively attempting to bring back Dracula, even believing this to be the wish of all mankind (Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia, 2008). This is in line with Cohen's suggestion that 'the undead returns in slightly different clothing, each time to be read against contemporary social movements or a specific, determining event...each reappearance and its analysis is bound in a double act of construction and reconstitution' (Cohen, 1996, pp. 6-7) In other words, each time Dracula reemerges, his function must change in accordance with how society has changed. Just as the genre of Gothic served a purpose in times of anxiety and stress upon society, Dracula is brought back by humans to serve a need.

Dracula's pain over his lost loves finally comes to some resolution in *Symphony of the Night*, when for the third time he faces his son in battle. Adrian continues to side with the humans, and Dracula is distraught, asking if he has forgotten what humans did to his mother. Adrian says he would never forget, but neither would he seek revenge against them. After Adrian has defeated Dracula once again, Dracula asks what Lisa's last words were. Adrian, who was present at her execution, quotes, 'do not hate humans. If you cannot live with them, then at least do them no harm' (Castlevania: Symphony of the Night, 1997).

Dracula is then overcome with remorse, and begs Lisa's forgiveness as he returns to the grave. Games succeeding *Symphony of the Night* see Dracula resurrected again several times, but primarily due to a misguided desire from humans to have Dracula serve some ill

purpose. Dracula meets his final end in 1999, at the hand of Julius Belmont (*Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow*, 2003). There is later danger of Dracula being reincarnated, but the resurrection cycle of Mathias Cronqvist has arguably come to an end. I say arguably, as the protagonist of *Aria of Sorrow*, Soma Cruz, bears a striking resemblance to Mathias Cronqvist, has most of Dracula's powers, and is given the choice to become the new lord of darkness. Some interpret Soma Cruz to be Mathias Cronqvist reborn, given a new chance at life (*Castlevania Wiki*, n.d.). I will shortly get into the significance of Adrian and Soma as I proceed with my final comparisons.



Figure 10: Mathias and Soma in matching fur collars

The Many Portrayals of Dracula

We have now looked at *Dracula* and the themes of Gothic fiction, we have reviewed plot and characters from the *Castlevania* series, and we have gone through some of the history that lead up to these works. It seems to me that there is not only a difference, but a *progression* in the way monsters and monstrous traits are portrayed. In his book *On Monsters*, Stephen Asma asks the question, ‘are monsters in the eye of the beholder?’ (2009, p. 274).

He mentions the Darwinian revolution, and how it has over time led us to better understand that ‘deviation, variation, mixing, and even hybridization are mechanisms of all biology’ (p. 275), and that this is natural. We are growing more accepting towards homosexuality, transexuality, bodily alterations through science, and other deviations that were the subject of horror and revulsion in the Gothic (Asma, 2009). Between the publication of *Dracula* and the release of the later *Castlevania* games, focus has been shifted, as is apparent in the characters of Adrian and Soma.

I have retold the story of *Castlevania*'s Dracula chronologically, but it was only in later instalments of the series that details about the Count's background were revealed. Adrian first helped fight his father during *Dracula's Curse*, published in 1989, but he was not to star as the protagonist of his own game until *Symphony of the Night*, eight years later, when more information about him and his relationship with his father was revealed. 2003 saw the release of *Aria of Sorrow*, in which we meet Soma Cruz, who stands out as the first protagonist to fight Dracula not as an outside force, but as a choice he has to make for himself. The

characters of Adrian and Soma represent the trend of turning traits that were once reserved for the antagonist into something the hero can embody as well. The monstrous is not simply reserved for the villain anymore; the monstrous can come from within yourself.



Figure 11: Adrian relives the death of his mother in a vision

When Stoker's *Dracula* turns into fog or rats, or commands wolves to do his bidding, he inspires terror and disgust. Through the course of *Symphony of the Night*, Adrian gains the power to transform into a wolf, a bat, or fog, allowing the player to access new areas and bypass enemies. While these transformations are in themselves not enough to keep us from supporting

Adrian, they allude to the metamorphoses and transformations of the Darwinian horrors in Gothic literature. When playing as Adrian, we explore a different side of the *abhuman*, where these powers benefit us rather than horrify us. His monstrousness, while rejecting his father and fighting for the good of humanity, makes him a tragic antihero with whom we can sympathise.

While Adrian struggles with what he is, Soma struggles with what he *can* be. He is monstrous in that he shares many of Dracula's powers, but the great thing about his character is his *potential* for monstrousness, something to which many of us can relate. The player may choose for Soma to give in and become Dracula, subsequently turning him evil and getting him killed by Adrian and another vampire hunter, ending the game. Soma can only remain the protagonist whilst he refuses to give in to his monstrousness and uses his monstrous powers for good.

Hurley writes that the Gothic 'is distinguished by its supernaturalist content, its fascination with social transgressions, and its departure, in formal terms, from the emerging norm of realism' (Hurley, 2002, p. 191). Playing as Adrian or Soma allows us to fulfil a need that Gothic fiction once provided; without being put in the role of the villain, we vicariously experience monstrous powers in a safe environment. When the player reaches Dracula and destroys him, this is the final redemption of the monstrous hero, which, like the destruction of the monster in Gothic fiction, serves to 'accomplish a kind of purification of human identity' (Hurley, 2002, p. 197).

The idea is that monsters in Gothic fiction represent the taboos of their time, and through these works the reader may confront their own issues with gender, sexuality, or other identity issues that are outside the norm. Seeing these monsters vanquished allows a sort of catharsis (Hurley, 2002). On the other hand, seeing monstrous traits in a protagonist, and seeing this protagonist use his monstrousness as a force of good without being corrupted, such as Soma using Dracula's powers without *becoming* Dracula, shows an acceptance of these previously taboo identity issues. Adrian can transform his body into *abhuman* shapes without losing his morality and sense of right and wrong, and though he is a *hybrid* between human and vampire, he still retains a capacity for good, proving that deviation and mixing is not bound to be a bad thing.

Castlevania provides another vicarious escape for its Japanese audience, as the main characters tend to be of European descent. While the earlier vampire fictions of Japan featured Japanese main characters threatened by western-influenced antagonists, the *Castlevania* series is largely about Europeans fighting a European vampire.



Figure 12: Original and redesigned Simon

Simon Belmont, the protagonist of the first and second *Castlevania* games, is portrayed with either blond or red hair, and western features. Surely, a Japanese game for a mainly Japanese audience would be more appealing with a Japanese protagonist? Surprisingly enough, this might not be the case by 1986. Like an infectious virus, western culture had by then influenced Japan to a point where western ideals of beauty were starting to take hold. Revolutionary changes in regards to westernisation and modernisation took place in Japan

between 1868 and 1900, and the ramifications have lasted (Japan Visitor, n.d.). For a period, Japan wanted nothing more than to impress the west and show that they were an equal global force, and the way they did this was to adopt western clothing, food and housing (Japan Visitor, n.d.). This in turn has affected the portrayals of their monsters and heroes.

Thus we have Simon Belmont, a tall, muscled, white and blond beefcake, featured as the protagonist of the first *Castlevania*. In his later, red-haired design from *Castlevania Chronicles*, he took on a more Asiatic appearance, and his face followed more closely the style of Japanese manga, but Simon and the rest of the Belmont family remains distinctly European in their portrayal. There is however a gradual increase in Japanese aesthetics with the later games. That said, our main concern is the monster of the series. How then is our main antagonist portrayed, the Count himself?

Dracula has, from the very beginning, been depicted with distinct western features. He dresses in quite traditional, western upper class clothing, and is never seen without his trademark cape. But then, oddly enough, he has far stronger ties to Japan than any of the Belmonts.

Firstly, *Castlevania*'s Dracula was once human, and had at that time black hair and narrow eyes, more reminiscent of Asian heritage. Secondly, there are the events of *Aria of Sorrow* and *Dawn of Sorrow*, during which his castle appears in Tokyo, and he is reincarnated as Soma, protagonist and Japanese schoolboy. Soma is literally choosing between his original Japanese persona and the western persona of Dracula.

Soma's background as a Japanese high school student is vital to the culture that created him. Uncountable anime and manga concern high school life in Japan, even in genres such as fantasy and science fiction. This extends into TV dramas, movies and pop idols. Student life is a baseline that just about any story can revolve around, and it was only a question of time until *Castlevania* dipped into the trope (Anime News Network, 2016). Soma is the first truly Japanese protagonist in *Castlevania*, satisfying popular tropes of a hero in Japanese manga and anime. He is also the first *Castlevania* protagonist to do so. What does this say about the Japanese spirit, that the antagonist of the series has



Figure 13: Soma slays zombies in the chapel with a katana

more ties to their nation than the majority of their heroes? That their one Japanese hero is a reincarnation of Dracula, the greatest evil ever inflicted upon the world? It may be an entirely new monstrosity born of an unhealthy focus on Caucasian aesthetics around the globe, and

this is reflected in Soma's monstrous traits. It is clear, in either case, that *Castlevania* does not retain the xenophobic agenda of earlier vampire fiction from Japan.

Aside from nationality, another theme that *Dracula* and *Castlevania* treats very differently is that of religion. Religion features heavily in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. It is by religious rites and tools that they are able to deter, and eventually vanquish, Dracula and his brides. Religious items are consistently used with reverence, and the protagonists are faithful, honest Christians. Vampirism frequently targets what is considered good, Christian values. It is not so much a battle between good and evil as it is a battle between Christianity and foreign superstition. Interestingly, this is the very opposite of the first Japanese vampire fiction, where western Christianity was the antagonist.

Religious symbolism also appears throughout *Castlevania*. The Japanese utilise Christianity in media very differently from what we may be familiar with. They often use Christian symbols and icons for their mystique and style, rather than any religious meaning. Christianity does exist in Japanese society, and Christian symbols are not *exceptionally* exotic, but the Japanese do have a very relaxed disposition towards religion and their use in entertainment (Quora, 2013).

As such, crosses, angel statues and other religious symbols appear frequently throughout *Castlevania* instalments. Reoccurring weapons used by the main characters of the games include the consecrated whip handed down through the Belmont family, as well as off-hand weapons such as a bottle of holy water, a whirling personal shield of flying bibles, and a



Figure 14: Cursed Richter attempts to hit Adrian in the face with Jesus

holy cross that in some games can be thrown like a boomerang and in other games appears as a twister of massive crucifixes. These religiously themed off-hand weapons stand side by side with magical items such as a pocket watch that stops time and a jewel that shoots lasers (Castlevania Wiki).

Now that we have looked at how *Dracula* and *Castlevania* treats xenophobia and religion,

there is the question of gender and sexuality. I already talked extensively about how *Dracula* treats these themes, but how does *Castlevania* compare?

Romance in *Castlevania* is generally only hinted at or implied. Some instalments feature a damsel in distress, but she is rarely confirmed to be romantically involved with the protagonist attempting to save her. A select few games, such as *Dracula's Curse* and *Portrait of Ruin*, feature a female playable character option. *Order of Ecclesia* (2008) was the first to feature a female character as the definite protagonist; her name is Shanoa, and she is as strong and well defined as any male protagonist in the series, if not more so. She is a stark contrast to the characters of Mina and Lucy from *Dracula*, who are defined by the men surrounding them. In fact, it is the male characters surrounding Shanoa who cause another resurrection of Dracula, forcing Shanoa to battle her misguided friend, her power-hungry tutor, and finally Dracula, defeating all three by the use of violence equalling that of any ideal of primal masculinity.

Shanoa is never shamed or punished for her active role throughout the course of the game, and in many ways she is the New Woman that Victorian society feared. Sexuality is generally not discussed in *Castlevania*, but Shanoa's independence and strength is on par with any man, and she proves herself a heroine rather than a monster in need of redemption from her proactive behaviour. While lacking in the sexual component, *Castlevania* still shows progression in the portrayal of women, turning what was monstrous before into the traits of a strong protagonist.

In the 111 years that have passed between *Dracula's* release in 1897 and *Ecclesia's* release in 2008, the New Woman has gone from being the horrifying monster of Victorian nightmares to a vampire-slaying heroine and champion of good.

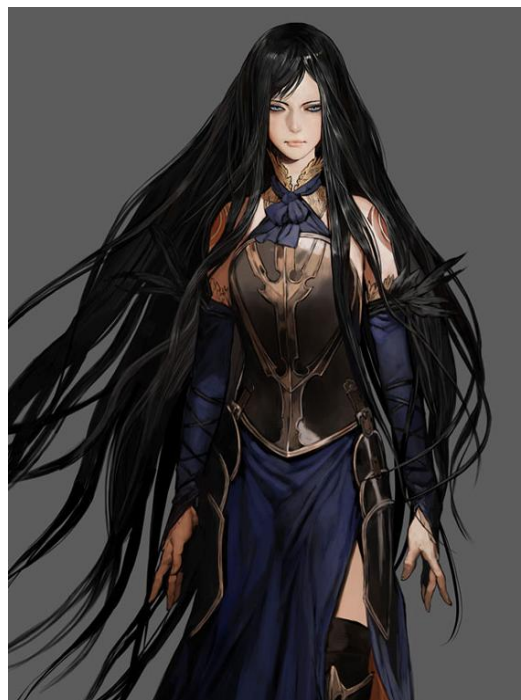


Figure 15: Shanoa in somewhat sensible armour

The Monster, a Cultural Product

Dracula has given us a picture of Victorian society's expectations of men and women, and its treatment of sexuality and religion. Meanwhile, the many instalments of the *Castlevania* series has given us a living image of monstrousness from the 80s and up to today.

My initial question was, how does a classic monster change in form and function when it is exported to a distinctly foreign culture? While I have discovered many contradicting ways of handling similar themes, such as the Japanese's light-hearted approach to religion and their use of vampires in anti-western literature, there is the question of time. How many of the differences between *Dracula* and *Castlevania* can be attributed to culture, and how many can be attributed to global modernisation?

We can certainly say that *Castlevania* took a more tasteful approach than the overtly sexualised movie adaptation by Francis Ford Coppola. The lack of sexual themes could just as easily be a result of the video game genre's confines as it is a product of the Japanese's cultural norms surrounding sex and sexuality.

What I *have* discovered is a trend towards humanising the monstrous. As we grow more accepting of the *abhuman*, we begin to explore the monstrous issues within ourselves. While Japanese entertainment likes to maintain the visuals of the vampire as an aristocratic foreigner, they are doing the same as many contemporary vampire fictions in the West; Vampirism is now more than just a curse to be banished, it is a condition that some have to suffer through.

The monster's function has changed. Rather than seeking some catharsis out of seeing the destruction of a vampire, we are experiencing monstrousness by living vicariously through protagonists with monstrous traits. Previously, the monster existed to be destroyed so that we might feel relief. Now, the monster exists so that it might teach us about ourselves and our own monstrosity. It always finds a new niche to fill, the ever evolving Darwinian horror.

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