

**Examining Blurring:**  
**An Anti-anthropocentric Comparative Study of European Vampirism and Shuten Dōji**

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## Quelling Blurring: “The Tale of Shuten Dōji” and Its Interpretations

Monsters are enigmatic mirrors of humans in the histories of cultures. Scholars have created theories to parse monster stories and analyze monsters, but they have regularly displayed an anthropocentric tendency to treat humans as subjects and monsters as non-human objects or “Others.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, in “Monstrosity and the Monstrous,” Georges Canguilhem proposes a philosophical system in order to understand what the representations of monsters mean to humans. There he contends that the monster is “a living being whose value is to be a counterpoint [to humans].”<sup>2</sup> Building on Canguilhem, Jeffrey Cohen, in his “seven theses” on monster theory, points to the monster’s symbolic function as “the harbinger of category crisis” and “the police of the borders of the possible.”<sup>3</sup> However, I will ask here, who is actually experiencing this “crisis” and who establishes these “borders”? Most theories have explored the roles of monsters in literature, but only from the perspective of humans, relegating monsters to the role of mere objects. A focus on monsters, on the other side, raises a question that will be the concern of this essay: what specific forms of agency can monsters have and what insights about agency do monster stories provide? By examining the different perspectives on humans and monsters that the monster stories give us access to, we can gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between the two groups and better understand the texts’ purposes behind the human-monster dyad they construct and deconstruct.

To answer those questions, this paper will conduct a comparative study focusing on two monsters that have complex psychologies and genealogies—the European vampire and a

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1. This essay’s use of the concept “anthropocentrism” does not directly refer to the philosophical movement, which argues against classical philosophy of modernism promoting subjectivity, individualism, and liberalism. However, the content of this essay can potentially be a part of that larger philosophical discussion.

2. George Canguilhem, “Monstrosity and the Monstrous,” trans. Teresa Jaeger, *Diogenes*, no. 10 (1962): 27-42.

3. Jeffrey Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” in *Monster Theory*, ed. Jeffrey Cohen (University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3-25.

Japanese monster called Shuten Dōji. These two monsters have similar traits that allow for a comparative study. Both monsters have aristocratic features, consume human blood or flesh (especially female's) as necessities, and demonstrate curiosity for the human realm. Furthermore, this paper locates the comparison in a comparable historical phase, namely the birth and development of bourgeois literature. Thus, for Shuten Dōji, an account of its historical context will be provided together with an emphasis on the close reading of the text "The Tale of Shuten Dōji." Then, in the second half, this essay will briefly address the historical development of the European vampire, and then focus on John Polidori's 1819 story "The Vampyre."

The legend of Shuten Dōji, one of Japan's most famous monsters, as well as the character of Lord Ruthven in Polidori's "The Vampyre," provide us with two interesting case studies of the monster as subject. The complex psychologies of both monstrous figures reveal the weakness of anthropocentric monster theories, which have narrowly construed monstrosity as a projection of human fear. Theories, which have led the readers to understand the stories as stories of separating humans and monsters into two opposing poles, have thereby limited the possibilities of understanding the two stories as stories of "blurring" divisions. "Blurring" here refers to the negotiation between established categories (e.g., between humans and monsters, the civilized and the barbaric, imagination and reality) and the destruction of the boundary between them. This essay will demonstrate that anthropocentric monster theories, which ignore the monsters' perspectives, lose their explanatory power when they encounter monsters with complex psychologies, such as Shuten Dōji and Lord Ruthven. Moreover, this essay will present alternative anti-anthropocentric readings of the two stories.

## **I. *Oni*, Shuten Dōji, and Their Interpretations**

This first half of this essay will explore the case of Shuten Dōji and Shuten Dōji's perspective in order to better understand the critical point of view found in the text of the legend in four parts. The first section provides an overview of existing theories on the *oni* monsters and introduces Shuten Dōji. The second section suggests a new model of understanding the relationship between Shuten Dōji and humans, which treats Shuten Dōji and humans as equal counterparts, as opposed to the anthropocentric model which places the human at the center of the world and Shuten Dōji at the margins of human control. The third section focuses on Shuten Dōji's perspective in order to highlight the negotiations, the blurring between the humans and the monsters. Finally, the fourth section evaluates this idea of blurring and concludes that it provides a new, an anti-anthropocentric way of understanding the monster-human nexus.

Among the “monsters” that we encounter in Japanese legends, Shuten Dōji (酒呑童子, also written as 酒顛童子, 酒天童子, or 朱点童子) belongs to the category of *oni* (鬼), which is usually translated into English as “demon,” “devil,” “monster,” or “ogre.” In addition to *oni*, the character has also been pronounced and glossed in Japanese as *kami* (god), *mono* (thing), and *shiko* (detestable being), and these different pronunciations highlight different characteristics of *oni*. *Oni* have a long history in Japanese culture and appear in the earliest-known Japanese texts such as the eighth-century histories *Records of Ancient Matters* (*Kojiki*, 712) and *The Chronicles of Japan* (*Nihon shoki*, 720). One of the earliest tales of the interaction between *oni* and human appears in the eighth-century text *Records of Wind and Earth of the Izumo Province* (*Izumo no kuni fudoki*), which is one of many gazetteers that records local geography, culture, and oral traditions.<sup>4</sup> *Oni* continue to be popular subjects of folktales, appearing in medieval collections of

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4. Hanabe Hideo, “Oni,” in *Nihon no minwa jiten* (Kōdansha, 2002), 294-296.

tales such as the twelfth-century *Anthology of Tales from the Past* (*Konjaku monogatari*) and the thirteenth-century *A Collection of Tales from Uji* (*Uji shūi monogatari*). These early texts, along with Buddhist depictions of hell and *oni* in texts such as *The Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land* (*Ōjōyōshū*, 985), have given *oni* the shape they have had since the medieval period.<sup>5</sup>

*Oni* usually appear in “quelling” (*taiji* 退治) stories, which narrate how courageous humans suppress *oni* and protect human territory. They prey on humans, have sharp teeth, red, green or black skin, and horns on their heads. In his study of Japanese monsters, Michael Foster writes:

The *oni* is generally portrayed in narratives and ritual contexts as a nasty otherworldly being who threatens humans; he is a person-shaped antiperson, encapsulating everything that imperils humans and human society ... The presumably negative and destructive *oni* can also assume a positive and creative role as antiestablishment rebel or underdog, the marginalized or disenfranchised Other who challenges the entrenched sociopolitical order and becomes a driving force in shaping history.<sup>6</sup>

Foster argues that the representations of *oni* depict threats and evoke fear. However, though Foster is aware of *oni*'s symbolic potential for performing social critique, he reads them as “marginalized” or “disenfranchised” figures. This reading, nevertheless, underestimates *oni*'s complex psychology. Resonating with Cohen's theory that perceives monsters as passive threats for humans, it reveals an anthropocentric view that only recognizes *oni* as the inferior Other. In other words, it overlooks the possibility that *oni* could instead be equal to humans, which represents a new dynamic that opens up a new way of comparing and contrasting monsters and humans. This anthropocentric model may work for many *oni* stories, but it fails to provide an

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5. Noriko T. Reider, “Shuten Dōji (Drunken Demon): A Medieval Story of the Carnavalesque and the Rise of Warriors and Fall of Oni,” *Japanese Demon Lore* (University Press of Colorado, Utah State University Press, 2010), 30.

6. Michael Dylan Foster, *The Book of Yōkai* (University of California Press, 2015), 118-119.

accurate account of what “The Tale of Shuten Dōji” conveys, namely, that the monsters are more human and the humans are more monstrous.

“The Tale of Shuten Dōji” is an eighteenth-century textual version of the legend of Shuten Dōji, the most famous “quelling” (*taiji*) story that had become a popular theme for picture scrolls (*emaki*), *nō* and *kabuki* plays, *ukiyo-e*, and remains a source for modern films, novels, games, animations, and *manga*.<sup>7</sup> The first narration of this *taiji* story appeared in a fourteenth-century picture scroll called *The Picture Scroll of Mount Ōe (Ōeyama Shuten Dōji emaki)*, which details the story of Minamoto no Yorimitsu quelling Shuten Dōji.<sup>8</sup> Since then,

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7. Komatsu Kazuhiko, *Nihon yōkai ibunroku* (Shōgakkan, 1992), 6-7.

8. Minamoto no Yorimitsu (源 頼光, 948-1021) served the regents of the Fujiwara clan. He is also known as Minamoto no Raikō, since Raikō is the Sino-Japanese reading of the two characters that make up his given name, otherwise read as Yorimitsu. This *emaki* version is also referred to as *Ōeyama ekotoba* (大江山絵詞). While the quelling (*taiji*) story itself does not detail Shuten Dōji’s life story, those narrations were later created, further proving that Shuten Dōji is a perfect example to examine the relation between the monster and the humans from the monster’s perspective. The two most influential narrations of Shuten Dōji’s life come from “The Tale of Shuten Dōji” from *Otogi-zōshi* and “Shuten Dōji” from a Nara picture book (*Nara ehon*, illustrated books produced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). In “The Tale of Shuten Dōji,” according to Shuten Dōji’s own account, he was born in the province of Echigo (*Echigo no kuni*) and raised in a temple since his childhood. According to Tanigawa Kenichi, a cultural anthropologist, Shuten Dōji’s father, Iwase, was a banished vassal of Emperor Kanmu (lived around 737-806)’s son Momozo no shinnō (桃園親王). Longing for a child, Iwase and his wife went to a shrine in Mount Togakushi to pray, and the wife soon became pregnant. However, the infant stayed in his mother’s womb for three years, and when he was finally born, he was named Gedōmaru (外道丸), someone outside the normal “Way.” Gedōmaru was a child with a fierce character yet unprecedented beauty, and his parents sent him to the Kokujōji Temple to tame his brutal nature. While he stayed in the temple as a monk, his handsome appearance attracted many women who sent him love letters. Gedōmaru decided to burn all of those letters, yet when he burnt them, smoke rose and transformed him into a monster. He fled out of the temple, moved to Mount Ōe, gained his name Shuten Dōji, and lived there until Minamoto no Yorimitsu came. In the second version presented by the Nara picture book, instead of in the province of Echigo, Shuten Dōji was born in the province of Ōmi (*Ōmi no kuni*). According to that legend, Shuten Dōji is the son of the mountain god of Ibuki (*Ibuki daimyōjin*), Yamata no orochi (an eight-headed and eight-tailed dragon or serpent). In the mountain range charged by Yamata no orochi, lived a man called Sugawa and his beautiful daughter Tamahime. While the father took great care of the daughter and wanted her to become a concubine of a high official in the court, an unknown man visited the daughter frequently and made her pregnant. The furious father went to a shrine and was told that that unknown man was Yamata no orochi in disguise, and his daughter’s child was indeed the god’s. The daughter then gave birth to a son, who was able to enjoy *sake* when he was only three. When he was ten, he was sent to a master in Mount Hiei to study Buddhism, yet instead of immersing himself in Buddhist studies, he indulged himself in drinking and dancing. In the mountain a ball was held, and Shuten Dōji decided to participate, making three thousand *oni* masks in only seven days. Satisfied by his own crafts, the drunken Shuten Dōji put one of the masks on his face. The mask sucked the flesh on his face and could not be separated from him—the *oni* mask became his face. The priests and monks were scared and banished him from the temple. He first went back to his mother in Mount Ibuki and lived in a stone cave. Then, he moved from mountain to mountain, and finally settled in Mount Ōe until Yorimitsu came to him. Since these narratives are

Shuten Dōji has been regarded as the king of *oni* (*oniō* 鬼王). Komatsu Kazuhiko, a Japanese cultural anthropologist who has written on Shuten Dōji, considers him “the most powerful hero in the history of Japanese monsters.”<sup>9</sup> This juxtaposition of “hero” and “monster” demonstrates the dual character of *oni*, a “negative” and a “positive” one in Foster’s words.<sup>10</sup>

The main focus of this essay, “The Tale of Shuten Dōji,” comes from *Otogi-zōshi* 御伽草子, an eighteenth-century collection of short stories created during the Muromachi period (1333–1568). The term *otogi-zōshi* was first used in the eighteenth-century as an appellation for a set of twenty-three medieval stories collected and printed around 1700 by the Osaka publisher Shibukawa Seiueemon (渋川清右衛門). It was later used by scholars beginning in the late nineteenth-century as a generic label for the whole body of short tales produced during the late Kamakura period (1185–1333) and the Muromachi period. “The Tale of Shuten Dōji” is one of the most famous in this collection. Compared to the earliest picture scroll version, the basic plot of this version remained the same, but certain details were changed (for instance, the names and genders of certain characters). Although some scholars, such as Komatsu, have viewed both versions together and explored a more generalized Shuten Dōji legend, this essay focuses on the textual *Otogi-zōshi* version alone.

“The Tale of Shuten Dōji” is set in the late tenth-century, during the Heian period (794–1185). According to the story, the demon Shuten Dōji from Mount Ōe abducts a large number of

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believed to appear after the earliest version of the quelling story, their emergencies reveal the audience’s urge to understand Shuten Dōji’s perspective. See Komatsu, 29.

9. Although I use gender neutral pronouns to refer to the specie of *oni*, I use masculine pronouns to refer to Shuten Dōji, since according to his legend, Shuten Dōji is specifically marked as a male *oni*.

10. Komatsu, 6.

maidens from the capital, turns them into slaves, drinks their blood and eats their flesh. After one of the emperor's favorite courtiers, Ikeda Chūnagon, loses his daughter, the emperor decides to send Minamoto no Yorimitsu and five other warriors to quell the demon.<sup>11</sup> With the most powerful weapons and blessings from deities, Yorimitsu and his companions set out. On their way three gods appear, tell them Shuten Dōji's weaknesses and give them a bottle of magic wine to debilitate Shuten Dōji. They then meet a woman washing bloody clothes at the river, who is a captive of Shuten Dōji, tells them her misery and leads them to Shuten Dōji's palace. When they arrive, Shuten Dōji welcomes them as guests and holds a great party. Shuten Dōji drinks the magic wine happily, shares his personal story with Yorimitsu, summons his fellow monsters to dance and sing, and retires to sleep after the party ends. Then, Yorimitsu and his companions bring their swords and enter Shuten Dōji's bedchamber. They chain Shuten Dōji's legs and arms, and as they cut off Shuten Dōji's head, Shuten Dōji opens his eyes and shouts, "You humans are liars! We *oni* do things in a proper Way!" When Shuten Dōji dies, thunder and lightning suddenly appear in the sky; his fellow demons fearlessly fight to avenge Shuten Dōji until the six human warriors kill them all. Then, the sun rises in Mount Ōe once again. Thanks to their hero Yorimitsu, the abducted maidens are rescued, the families reunite, the emperor is pleased, the capital is protected, and everyone lives happily ever after.

Traditionally, the story of Shuten Dōji has been perceived as a didactic tale (*setsuwa*).<sup>12</sup> Komatsu presents a compelling argument for understanding the story of Shuten Dōji as a story of "taking the pearl" (*tamatori* 珠取り), which means "to conquer the wild."<sup>13</sup> Although *tama* can

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11. Minamoto no Yorimitsu's companions include Watanabe no Tsuna (渡辺綱), Sakata Kintoki (坂田金時), Usui Sadamitsu (碓井貞光), and Urabe no Suetake (卜部季武).

12. Komatsu, "Ōeyama to oni setsuwa," *Kai no minzokugaku*, no. 4 (2000): 314-326.

13. Komatsu, *Shuten Dōji no kubi* (Kabushikikaisha Serika Shobō, 1997), 9-16.



mean ‘soul’ when it is written as 魂, here it is physical, indicated by the character 珠, which means ‘pearl.’ According to Komatsu, *tama* overlaps with the concepts of *mono* and *kami* (which, as mentioned before, are different pronunciations for the character *oni* (鬼), meaning “thing” and “god” respectively). In other words, *tama* possesses a kind of spiritual force and can transform into supernatural monstrous beings. Komatsu applies this *tama* concept to the story of Shuten Dōji, arguing that Shuten Dōji represents the *tama* wandering in the exterior sphere (*gaibu* 外部) outside of humans’ interior sphere (*naibu* 内部). In other words, the story of quelling Shuten Dōji is about conquering the *tama*. Komatsu further claims that the *tama* represented by Shuten Dōji is an *aratama* (荒魂), a wandering wild spirit, as opposed to a *nigitama* (和魂), a spirit within civilized human society. Thus, “taking the pearl” in this case means conquering the wild forces exterior to the human domain. Komatsu then concludes that the story of Shuten Dōji is essentially about civilization represented by the imperial court expanding into and conquering the wild.

Komatsu’s analysis sheds light on the didactic nature of the story of Shuten Dōji, which seems to inform people of the power and legitimacy of the court and Minamoto no Yorimitsu, a prominent Heian warrior from the Minamoto family, whose member later founded the Kamakura Shogunate. However, Komatsu has understood Shuten Dōji exclusively from the perspective of the humans and the imperial court. This anthropocentric view is evident in his use of the term *tamatori* (珠取り). The transitive verb *tori* (to take) demands a subject. Since he uses this term to refer to the human interior sphere (*naibu*) conquering the wild exterior sphere (*gaibu*), Komatsu

assumes the subject of this action—“taking”—to be humans. But “taking the pearl” is an inadequate understanding of “The Tale of Shuten Dōji.” In “The Tale of Shuten Dōji,” what appears as conquering is actually an exchange and negotiation with the monster that then shows itself to be an equal, and even more civilized being than the humans. From an anti-anthropocentric point of view, this essay argues that “The Tale of Shuten Dōji,” instead of reaffirming the legitimacy of imperial rule, can be read as a hidden critique of “civilized” society itself. It attempts to destroy and redefine the binary order of *aratama* and *nigitama*, of barbaric and civilized, evil and just.

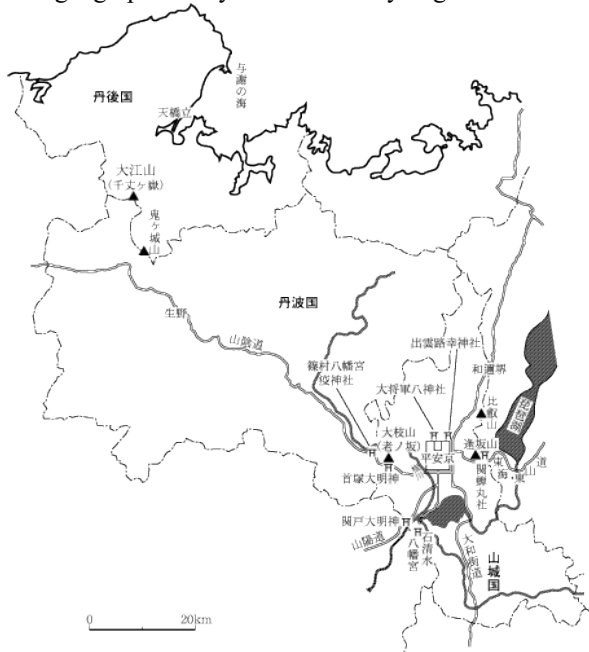
## II. Mapping the Two Realms

The story indeed invites an anti-anthropocentric interpretation that sees the world as “bicentric” and humans and monsters as equals. Although the story’s use of physical space seems to support Komatsu’s anthropocentric reading, the change in the humans’ understanding of Shuten Dōji as they move from the human realm to the *oni* realm undermines that reading. Starting from the capital, Heian-kyō, Minamoto no Yorimitsu moves to the northwest. The contrast between the capital, marked with palaces and shrines, and the wild forest area around Mount Ōe, Shuten Dōji’s domain, seems to demonstrate that Yorimitsu moves from the civilized

interior realm (*naibu*) to the wild natural exterior (*gaibu*).<sup>14</sup> However, the text complicates this when it presents us with three ways of referring to Shuten Dōji’s location. In doing so, it draws attention to the different perspectives that we take on while reading. The first is “*oni*’s palace” (*oni ga jyā* 鬼が城), used by the narrator when describing Yorimitsu’s destination.<sup>15</sup> The second one, “*oni*’s stone cave” (*oni no ihaya* 鬼の岩屋), and the third one, “*oni*’s domain” (*oni no sumika* 鬼のすみか), appear in the dialogue between Yorimitsu and a firewood cutter when Yorimitsu leaves the capital and enters the wild:

“Firewood cutter! Where is the Senjōdake cliff of this province? Tell me in detail where the *oni*’s stone cave (*oni no ihaya*) is,” Minamoto no Yorimitsu asks. The firewood cutter replies, “Go across this mountain and go across those valleys. Over the peaks lays the *oni*’s domain (*oni no sumika*), a place humans should not go.”<sup>16</sup>

14. The geographical layout of this story aligns with that in reality.



Yamada Kunikazu, “Shuten Dōji no Ōeyama,” *Kokuritsu nōgakudō*, no. 234 (Feb 2003), under “Minamoto no Yorimitsu no yōkai taiji 1,” an image, <http://homepage-nifty.com/heiankyo/kuni/yomo20.html> (accessed Sep 5, 2018).

15. “Shuten Dōji den,” in *Otogi-zōshi shū*, ed. Ōshima Tatehiko, *Nihon koten bungaku zenshū*, vol. 36 (Shōgakukan, 1989), 448.

16. “Shuten Dōji den,” 448-449. Translation mine. I provide a more literal translation of passages from “The

These three ways of referring to Shuten Dōji's place present three different perceptions of him. The narrator perceives Shuten Dōji as a counterpart of human emperors who occupy palaces. Yorimitsu embodies the interest of human society, perceiving Shuten Dōji's culture as a part of the untamed nature. On the other hand, the firewood cutter, dwelling at the boundary between those two realms, defines Shuten Dōji's place neither as wild nor as civilized with the neutral term "domain." When Yorimitsu asks the firewood cutter where Shuten Dōji's "stone cave" is, the firewood cutter answers with directions to Shuten Dōji's "domain." The firewood cutter's active effort to negate the phrase "*oni*'s stone cave" calls into question the understanding of *oni* as the wild (*aratama*).

We are compelled to further reconsider Yorimitsu's attitude toward Shuten Dōji as we arrive at the *oni*'s domain. Shuten Dōji's residence is far from a "stone cave" that represents untamed nature. Instead, he occupies a capital that resembles, parallels, and even exceeds human civilization. Outside of Shuten Dōji's domain, Yorimitsu meets a human woman abducted by Shuten Dōji, and the woman provides a detailed description of Shuten Dōji's residence:

Please follow this river upstream and you will find the demon's place. They built an iron gate, with Shuten Dōji's fellow demons gathered there and guarding it. Please then sneak through the gate. You will see an imposing azure palace with rows of roofs and bejeweled screens. The living quarters of the palace are adorned to represent the four seasons. They are built of iron, and named the Iron Palace. At night, we are summoned to the demons' iron living quarters where we perform menial duties.<sup>17</sup>

This portrayal conflicts with Yorimitsu's (and Komatsu Kazuhiko's) understanding of Shuten Dōji, which is defined by the perspective from the human capital. Instead of a "stone cave," Shuten Dōji occupies a palace paralleling the palace of human emperors. Although different

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Tale of Shuten Dōji" for my analyses. I have based some of my translations on Reider's. See Reider, "Shuten Dōji: 'Drunken Demon,'" *Asian Folklore Studies* 64, no. 2 (2005): 217. I use a modified version of Hepburn Romanization that is meant to reflect the orthography, and not the expected contemporary pronunciation of the text. For example, I would transcribe おもひ into *omohi* rather than *omoi*.

17. "Shuten Dōji den," 454. Translation mine based on Reider's.

from human palaces made of wood, Shuten Dōji's iron palace does not lack elegance, a core quality pursued by the Heian court. The "azure palace" and its "bejeweled screens" suggest Shuten Dōji to be quite wealthy, and his dwellings that "represent the four seasons" demonstrate his artistic taste. Moreover, while the capital decides to quell Shuten Dōji for his barbaric and cruel practices, Shuten Dōji's behavior toward those abducted women, to demand them to perform "menial duties," would have been a normal request a male human aristocrat makes to his servants. Hence, Shuten Dōji's image as a barbaric, evil monster gradually declines as we move out of the human realm and move into Shuten Dōji's domain. In his domain, the juxtaposition of the wild wandering spirit (*aratama*) and the civilized spirit (*nigitama*) disappears. Foster's conception of "the marginalized or disenfranchised Other" does not fit Shuten Dōji, who appears as an equal to the human emperor in these passages.

The potential historical parallel between Shuten Dōji and Taira no Masakado, a powerful Heian aristocratic warrior from another important warrior family, which fought against the Minamoto family during the Genpei War ending the Heian period, further allows us to question the supposition that Shuten Dōji is simply an abject wild monster. The text records that Shuten Dōji was quelled on the sixteenth day of the ninth month of the second year of the Shōryaku era (992). However, it is revealing to compare the events of Shuten Dōji with a rebellion from earlier in that century. The rebellion was started by Taira no Masakado, a warrior landlord in the Kantō area, the area around modern Tokyo. His rebellion grew out of a family dispute over his authority, leading to local skirmishes in the Kantō area beginning in 935, which then escalated into a rebellion against the imperial government in Kyoto in 939. The emperor then sent two military leaders (*ōryōshi* 押領使) to suppress the rebellion, who killed Taira no Masakado in

940.<sup>18</sup> This rebellion posed an unprecedented threat to the emperor since Masakado declared himself to be the “New Emperor, the only such imperial pretender in premodern Japanese history.”<sup>19</sup> Since Taira no Masakado’s rebellion was the most significant one in Japanese history up to that point, it may be conjectured that Shuten Dōji’s contemporaries in the story, who were fifty years away from that event, may have had it in mind when Shuten Dōji appears as another “emperor” who challenges the establishment of the human imperial court. Given that the story of Shuten Dōji itself is merely set in that time, the image of Shuten Dōji might be modeled on Masakado. Masakado suffered a fate similar to Shuten Dōji’s, as his rebellion was suppressed by the imperial court, and his historical role allows us to reconceptualize Shuten Dōji not as a monster inferior to humans, but as an imperial counterpart and rival who has the potential to challenge and overthrow the emperor. In short, the descriptions of Shuten Dōji’s domain in the text as well as the historical associations that the figure of Shuten Dōji evokes undermine the anthropocentric perspective that makes the monsters into wild and barbaric “Others.”

### III. “Blurring”

The human characters’ physical movement into Shuten Dōji’s realm as well as the similarity between the human realm and the monster’s realm set the stage for exchanges and negotiations that further reduce the differences. This similarity between humans and monsters calls into question the boundaries between humans and a supposed Other, and the division between the civilized and the wild blurs. Different from the anthropocentric human perspective

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18. Using warriors to solve the problems caused by overly powerful warriors became a common strategy of the court, an effective strategy that helped the Heian court to solidify its power in the regions. However, it finally led to the court’s decline when the emperor lost control over the prominent warrior families. Although I refrain from claiming that the quelling of Shuten Dōji was modeled on Taira no Masakado’s story, this is a possible argument that requires more research.

19. William Farris, *Heavenly Warriors: The Evolution of Japan’s Military, 500-1300* (Harvard University Press, 1992), 120.

that requires the separation of monsters and humans, the depiction of Shuten Dōji evokes a blurring of the two. The idea of blurring is indeed key for deciphering the dynamic between Shuten Dōji and Yorimitsu. This section will illustrate how blurring happens and its importance to both Shuten Dōji and Yorimitsu by analyzing moments that present the blurring of human and *oni* cultures.

Remarkably, in the first encounter and exchange between the warrior and the monster, Yorimitsu's humanness diminishes. While Shuten Dōji welcomes Minamoto no Yorimitsu after hearing that he is a mountain hermit who has lost his way, he is still suspicious and tests Yorimitsu by asking him to drink wine made of blood and eat human flesh. Yorimitsu pretends that he enjoys the meal and gains Shuten Dōji's trust. For Shuten Dōji, Yorimitsu's action constitutes the promise of cultural blurring, a sign of intimacy Yorimitsu uses to deceive him. On the other hand, for Yorimitsu, the boundary between human and *oni* is compromised by Yorimitsu's act of eating flesh and drinking blood. To humans, *oni*'s flesh-eating and blood-drinking customs are the most prominent traits that define *oni* and distinguish *oni* from humans. Hence, Yorimitsu and his human companions undergo a transformation as they adapt to the *oni*'s different and "barbaric" customs. When Yorimitsu and his companions consume flesh and blood, their humanness is indeed compromised and they are turned into non-humans at the very same time they are trying to eliminate the non-human Other. Yorimitsu's physical movement into Shuten Dōji's place suggests a shift in perception, through which the boundary between the human and the *oni* is blurred. When Yorimitsu also becomes a creature that eats flesh and drinks human blood, he in fact turns into an *oni*. The blurring process—the transition from human to *oni* and the affirmation of a state in-between—is completed.

At this point, Yorimitsu also uses Buddhist statements of blurring to deconstruct the established differences between humans and *oni*. Yorimitsu explains to Shuten Dōji why he accepts *oni*'s food: "To defeat or be defeated is but a dream. I am not, yet I am, and there are no two tastes in eating. We all attain Buddhahood."<sup>20</sup> These statements reinforce a state of blurring, eliminating the difference between dream and reality, and self and non-self; they also thereby, once again, undermine the opposition between human culture and *oni* culture.<sup>21</sup> Yorimitsu later relies on a similar Buddhist language when Shuten Dōji grows suspicious of him. After Shuten Dōji tells his personal story, he looks into Yorimitsu's eyes. Then he suddenly realizes, because of his supernatural power, that Yorimitsu is the warrior whose follower had chopped off the arm of his fellow monster, Ibaraki Dōji. This enrages Shuten Dōji and he wants to kill Yorimitsu. To calm Shuten Dōji down, Yorimitsu tells him a story about the previous life of Shakyamuni, the Buddha:

Shakyamuni, whose name was Shiufū in his previous life, set out to undertake an ascetic life. One day, while making his way through a mountain pass, he heard the voice of an unidentified being call out in verse from somewhere deep in the valley, "All things are transient." Shiufū then descended into the valley only to discover a frightening-looking demon with eight heads and nine legs. Shiufū approached the demon and asked, "Please teach me the rest of the verse." The demon replied, "It would be easy to tell you but I am overwhelmed with hunger. I might be persuaded to recite it for you, if I could sate my hunger with human flesh." Hearing this, Shiufū stated, "That is extremely easy. If you can recite the rest of the verse, I shall be your food." The demon was delighted to hear Shiufū's offer and proceeded to recite the rest of the verse: "Transition is the law of birth and extinction, all things alive are destined to expire, detach yourself from the transient world and you will attain the joy of Nirvana." After receiving the verse, Shiufū thanked the demon. No sooner had Shiufū entered the demon's mouth than the demon transformed into Vairocana and Shiufū became Shakyamuni.<sup>22</sup>

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20. Reider, "Shuten Dōji: 'Drunken Demon,'" 220.

21. This state of blurring can be understood through the Buddhist term *zenakufuni* (善惡不二), meaning that the good and the bad are not two different things.

22. Reider, 222. Vairocana is a Buddha who sheds light over the universe. In esoteric Buddhism, Vairocana is most revered.



This story further stresses the blurring aspect of Yorimitsu's earlier statement, which concludes, "We all attain Buddhahood." Still, and more significantly, in this story the demon's own identity is blurred and comes to embrace opposing qualities: it seems to be controlled by its desire for human flesh, yet it is also a progenitor of Buddhism, teaching the message of non-attachment to Shakyamuni. Moving beyond the "bicentric" model that might still acknowledge minor differences between these two groups, this Buddhist story takes a radical step, further integrating human culture and *oni* culture into one indistinguishable whole. Moreover, the very Buddhist message the demon teaches Shakyamuni is itself about blurring: "Transition is the law of birth and extinction, all things alive are destined to expire, detach yourself from the transient world and you will attain the joy of Nirvana." In this statement, "all things" that fall under "the law of birth and extinction" become the same, and the path to salvation is provided indiscriminately to humans and monsters. In other words, this statement promises a salvation that eliminates the division between monsters and humans.

During these interactions, in contrast to Yorimitsu, who becomes more "monstrous," Shuten Dōji becomes more "human," mainly through the expressions of his religious faith. From the moment Yorimitsu utters, "We all attain Buddhahood," Shuten Dōji considers Yorimitsu as a friend because Shuten Dōji desires the final "blurred" state of Buddhahood, in which established distinctions between humans and monsters do not exist. As Shuten Dōji tells Yorimitsu about his past, we learn that Shuten Dōji pursued Buddhist studies but was banished from the human territory and failed to achieve enlightenment. This confession reveals that Shuten Dōji has been alienated from attaining Buddhist enlightenment involuntarily, and based on the appreciation he has for Yorimitsu's first Buddhist message about "blurring," Shuten Dōji seems to have the desire to be accepted by and included in Buddhahood again. Similarly, in the original, the

Shakyamuni story “deceives” Shuten Dōji and makes him “grateful” because it constitutes a promise of blurring, which offers a path toward Shuten Dōji’s desired enlightenment. By depicting the demon as the source of the Buddhist message, this story thus opens up an opportunity for Shuten Dōji, who had been denied the path to enlightenment because of his monstrosity, to not only return to Buddhism, but also be at the center of it, since the story depicts the demon, the monstrous Other, as the source of Buddha’s teachings. The fact that Yorimitsu is able to use promises of blurring, which in this context are Buddhist, to deceive Shuten Dōji twice, reflects and highlights Shuten Dōji’s longing for Buddhahood. Because of his religious faith and the way this text makes use of it, Shuten Dōji’s image as a barbaric monster disappears.

#### **IV. “You humans are liars! We *oni* do things in a proper Way!”**

The interaction between the human characters and Shuten Dōji, which eliminates the boundaries between them established by humans, allows us to see a new dynamic between them and the significance behind it. This section examines what this “blurred” state between humans and monsters enables us to see, and whose interest Shuten Dōji may represent.

At first glance, Shuten Dōji’s desire for blurring, to live an imperial life and to be accepted by Buddhism, seems to support the anthropocentric reading of this tale. If what the monster desires is to be a part of human culture, the monster might have considered their own culture inferior. Yet, the question raised by the exchanges between the two protagonists is this: Do human characters in this story embody the “human” ideals Shuten Dōji pursues? The answer is no. In fact, Shuten Dōji is closer to those ideals. Considering the historical context of the eighteenth-century publication of this *Otogi-zōshi* text, we might well understand these as

Confucian values, since Confucianism was generally promoted by the Tokugawa Shogunate and established the morality of that period.<sup>23</sup>

The story emphasizes the contrast between monsters and humans in terms of Confucian values. Shuten Dōji and his monsters demonstrate all five core virtues of Confucianism:

benevolence (*ren* 仁), rightness (*yi* 義), propriety (*li* 禮), wisdom (*zhi* 智), and faithfulness (*xin*

信). While the *oni*'s consumption of human flesh seems to prove their utter barbarism, the tale

depicts Shuten Dōji's *oni* followers as disciplined enough to control their desire for flesh:

[Minamoto no Yorimitsu] and his men would surely have been eaten had there not been one among this overzealous band of flesh-hungry demons who warned, "Haste makes waste! We should not hasten forward for our own personal gratification. We should first check with our master and at his instruction, then we'll tear them apart." The rest of the demons agreed and proceeded to the inner palace to report to Shuten Dōji.<sup>24</sup>

This passage demonstrates that Shuten Dōji's court has a highly developed hierarchical structure that aligns with the Confucian idea of "propriety" (*li*). In Analects 12.11, when Confucius is

asked what good governance is, he says, "Let the ruler be a ruler, the subject a subject, the father a father, the son a son (*jun jun, chen chen, fu fu, zi zi* 君君,臣臣,父父,子子)."<sup>25</sup> Using the

concept of "the rectification of names" (*cheng-ming* 正名), in 13.3, he then stresses the

importance for a society to have a proper order.<sup>26</sup> Hence, the system at Shuten Dōji's place

adheres to the Confucian standard of a good government—loyalty to one's master prevails, yet a

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23. Peter Nosco, "Introduction: Neo-Confucianism and Tokugawa Discourse," in *Confucianism and Tokugawa Culture*, ed. Peter Nosco (Princeton University Press, 1984), 4-6. This essay does not attempt to distinguish Neo-Confucianism, the official leading ideology of the Tokugawa Shogunate, and Confucianism, the original school of philosophy founded by Confucius, but discusses Confucian ideas during the Edo period in more general terms. See *Confucianism and Tokugawa Culture* for more information on Confucianism in Japan.

24. Reider, 218.

25. *The Analects*, trans. D. C. Lau (Penguin Classics, 1979), 114.

26. *The Analects*, 118.

certain degree of democracy also exists among the followers. Instead of satisfying their personal desires, these *oni* value and fulfill their duty to their lord, Shuten Dōji. This challenges the human perception of them as uncivilized.

Shuten Dōji also possesses Confucian virtues. He embraces the courtesy and intelligence of a good emperor, inviting Minamoto no Yorimitsu into his palace and asking him where he comes from in a rhetorically sophisticated language that is usually reserved for a speaker of higher status than the addressee, such as *shā ji mō se* (請じ申せ bring them to me), and *katare*, *kikan* (語れ、聞かん Speak, I will listen). The composition of Shuten Dōji’s sentences demonstrates his fine education. He speaks in a classical Chinese style characterized by parallelism and juxtapositions:

The mountain I live on is no ordinary mountain—the boulders and rocks are towering and the gorges are deep with no passage. Neither birds of flight nor beasts that run on earth can approach this summit, for there is no passageway for them, let alone humans. Did you, despite being human, fly here?”<sup>27</sup>

This passage demonstrates Shuten Dōji’s command of an elegant parallel structure as well as his polite interest in Yorimitsu. Moreover, he demonstrates the most admired quality in Confucianism, which is benevolence (*ren*). Although Shuten Dōji recognizes Yorimitsu’s identity as a human, he decides not to kill him. In other words, Shuten Dōji does not seem to embrace the antagonistic tension between *oni* and humans that is established in the capital.

In contrast, the humans have hardly perfected these virtues. First of all, the purpose of their “quelling” expedition is depicted as unjust. In “The Tale of Shuten Dōji,” a fortune teller describes the abduction of the court official’s daughter as a punishment from the gods, since the parents were not satisfied after the gods had given them a daughter and still wanted a son. In this

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27. Reider, 219.

scenario, Shuten Dōji becomes less “guilty,” because the responsibility is shifted to the human couple. Secondly, when attacked by Yorimitsu, Shuten Dōji’s last words serve as an open criticism of the human characters’ moral code. Shuten Dōji shouts, “You humans are liars! We *oni* do things in a proper Way!” As we have seen, Yorimitsu disguises himself as a mountain hermit, deceives Shuten Dōji multiple times, brings a sword into his bedroom and finally assassinates him, who considers Yorimitsu his new friend. These actions fail to meet Confucian standards of faithfulness (*xin*), propriety (*li*) and rightness (*yi*). These contrasts suggest that although Shuten Dōji is banished from human society, he and his fellow monsters adhere to Confucian discipline, while, on the other hand, the human characters who fight in the name of human civilization, betray it. Thus, from Shuten Dōji’s point of view, the Confucian values transcend the human-defined distinction between humans and monsters.

The contrast between the human characters and the monsters constitutes here, in fact, a social critique. Noriko Reider argues that Yorimitsu represents a new class of warriors on the rise in the late Heian period, and claims that in quelling stories, *oni*’s function is to glorify warriors, since “the more demonic the opponent, the greater the fame of the warrior who subdues him.”<sup>28</sup> But what would this representation of a warrior failing to live up to Confucian ideals mean for the eighteenth-century society in which *Otogi-zōshi* was compiled? The story was published around 1700, in the midst of rapid urbanization and the development of a national print culture; it would have been read much more widely than its medieval predecessors, and its publication might largely serve the interest of the commoners. At the time, the Tokugawa government, which promoted Confucianism, had established laws that separated the politically and socially privileged warrior class from other classes. Regulated by texts such as *Various Points of Laws*

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28. Reider, *Japanese Demon Lore*, 51.

for *Warrior Houses* (*Buke shohatto* 武家諸法度), warriors were elevated above the peasant, artisan, and merchant classes. Yamaga Sokō, one of the most important philosophers of the seventeenth-century, argues that the duty of the warrior class is to embody Confucian ideals in order to govern the society and offer it a moral example. In his mid-sixteenth-century text *The Way of the Samurai* (*Shidō* 士道), Sokō states that while other classes (the peasants, artisans and merchants) have no leisure from their occupations to “fully exemplify the [Confucian] Way,” the warriors should fulfill all the “fundamental moral obligations.”<sup>29</sup> Hence, when Yorimitsu fails to meet the moral expectations of the eighteenth-century society, the story calls into question the established differences between the “virtuous” warrior class and the “less morally refined” lower classes, which the *oni* might represent. By demonstrating that monsters adhere to ethical ideals more loyally than humans, this story may thus, in the eighteenth-century context, be read as a critique of the ruling warrior class. Shuten Dōji represents the interest of the commoners, who, after creating a state of blurring that deconstructs old categories, question the established divide between themselves and the established privileged class. In other words, the story aims to let readers rethink the dynamic between the civilized and the barbarian, between human and monster.

The narration of Yorimitsu’s physical movement into Shuten Dōji’s territory, the portrayal of Shuten Dōji’s culture, and the interaction between these poles embody the blurring of oppositions. The “blurred” state in this story helps us to compare and contrast the human characters and *oni*, and offers us a chance to question their old dynamic defined by humans. The

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29. *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, vol.1, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 388-392.

eighteenth-century “The Tale of Shuten Dōji” emphasizes this notion of blurring, and further uses the ground created by blurring to suggest another dynamic, namely that monsters are more civilized than people, and that humans are more monstrous than monsters. In other words, the eighteenth-century text “The Tale of Shuten Dōji” does not glorify Yorimitsu but rather deconsecrates him, the representative of the warrior class, thereby obliquely criticizing the contemporary society. Approaches that assume the monsters’ marginal and inferior role could not make and have not made this final observation possible. In the story, Yorimitsu vanquishes the monster, but only after substantive blurring and negotiation, and in doing so exposes himself as the more monstrous figure. Shuten Dōji may represent the interests of Edo commoners, and the story itself reveals the commoners’ questioning of the establishment’s “anti-blurring” social order. In other words, in “The Tale of Shuten Dōji,” an anthropocentric perspective thus quells an anti-anthropocentric perspective, which is used here to establish a perspective of social critique.

## V. “Queering” and Vampirism

“Blurring” can also be understood in terms of “queering.” Originally the word “queer” meant “strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric,” and in discussions of sexuality and queer theory it has come to refer to “a sexual or gender identity that does not correspond to established ideas of sexuality and gender.”<sup>30</sup> If we understand this second definition loosely, Shuten Dōji, who represents the Other in humans’ eyes, is “queer.” Although in this essay, I am reading Shuten Dōji’s “queering” primarily in cultural and political terms, there is also a space for a reading that emphasizes a homosexual dynamic in the relationship between Yorimitsu and Shuten Dōji. A

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30. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “queer.”

homoerotic culture between warriors indeed existed when the story was written, and compared to his interest in Yorimitsu, Shuten Dōji shows little interest in those women he abducted. Shuten Dōji's sexuality is not our concern, yet this “blurring” between the monster and the human can indeed also evoke emotional and sexual “queering.” European vampirism, as well, is a perfect example to demonstrate how the genealogy of the blood-drinking monster, preserves and transforms “queering,” and how specific vampire stories use this element to construct the dynamic between the monster and human.

Vampirism in the West has a long history, and I want to provide a short survey, a chronological account from the third millennium BC until the publication of Bram Stoker's iconic *Dracula* in 1897.<sup>31</sup> The Penguin English Dictionary defines a vampire as “a dead person believed to come from the grave at night and suck the blood of living people.”<sup>32</sup> According to Bartlett and Idriceanu, this definition reveals three crucial traits of a vampire: “the physical appearance of death combined with the ability of returning to a kind of existence,” its need for blood as a diet, and a life that depends on preying and exploiting others.<sup>33</sup> Since the third millennium BC, records regarding vampire-like creatures have existed in Assyrian and Babylonian traditions. These are primarily female demons who died of unattainable love or violence and who are determined to take revenge on humans. In the first millennium, documents that testify to the origins of Western

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31. This paper will focus on European Vampirism, especially Western European vampirism, examining fictions and historical accounts written by Western Europeans. Granted, vampirism has a universal presence. According to Bartlett and Idriceanu, India has *bhuta* and *brahmaparush*, China has *kuang-shi*, Japan has *kasha*, Philippine has *aswang*, and South America has *lobishomen*. Although in my opinion, *kuang-shi* and *kasha* are more similar to zombies than vampires for their lack of thinking and inability to control their movements well, blood-sucking undead monsters do exist in East Asian cultures, though not exactly the same as what West European vampirism demands. See Wayne Bartlett and Flavia Idriceanu, *Legends of Blood: The Vampire in History and Myth* (Praeger Publishers, 2006).

32. Penguin *English Dictionary*, s.v. “queer.”

33. Wayne Bartlett and Flavia Idriceanu, *Legends of Blood: The Vampire in History and Myth* (Praeger Publishers, 2006), 1. While the first two traits are objective descriptions, the third one embodies the perspective of human beings, the victims of vampires, leaving this question—are vampires evil or considered evil by humans? This tension is also mentioned in the section of Shuten Dōji.



European Vampirism appeared in Greece, then moved to Rome. Lamiae in Greek, and lamiae, striges, or mormos in Roman myths and folktales were female figures who ate children as well as young men. Bartlett and Idriceanu understand this trait as “the abuse of innocents,” a key characteristic of vampirism first possessed by lamiae.<sup>34</sup> Besides “the corruption of innocence,” the lamiae tradition further marks other traits that appear in later works. These include “[foreignness]”, “[strangeness]”, the vampire’s fascination with “youth, purity, and strength,” and “the power of blood.”<sup>35</sup> Similar to Shuten Dōji’s case, the latter one, which becomes the most salient trait of vampires in the eyes of humans, was further intensified by the introduction of Christianity, which stresses the sacredness of blood. Throughout the medieval period, accounts of vampires continued to appear, with William of Newburgh becoming a major writer of those supernatural events including the case of “the Squire of Alnwick” and the case of “Melrose Abbey, Scotland.”<sup>36</sup> Finally, in Early Modernity, authorities who held different opinions regarding vampirism appeared gradually, expressing efforts to comprehend the existence and nature of vampires. They reinterpreted the vampires as demons and fallen angles. The most prominent one was Louis Lavater, a Protestant theologian who wrote *Of Ghosts and Spirits Walking by Night*, explaining the nature of vampires and bringing “divine intervention” into the vampire legend.<sup>37</sup> Accounts (historical accounts, records) of vampires continued to appear and had unprecedented influence in Europe, usually passing from the decaying Ottoman Empire into growing European empires. We observe thus an increasing number of accounts.

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34. The focus on vampire contaminating “innocence,” which is also a crucial trait for Shuten Dōji, brings up this question: to whom are the victims innocent? This relative perspective will lead to critical representations and interpretations of the monster stories (will be discussed later in this paper). *Lamiae* had a great influence in ancient Greece, leading to Philostratus’s *Life of Apollonius*, which further inspired John Keats to write his poem “Lamia.” See Bartlett and Idriceanu, *Legends of Blood: The Vampire in History and Myth*, 5.

35. Bartlett and Idriceanu, 6.

36. Also known as William Parvus (1136?-1198?). Famous for composing *History of English Affairs (Historia rerum Anglicarum)*, a history of England from 1066 to 1198.

37. Bartlett and Idriceanu, 9.

The first occurrence of the word “vampire” in the English language testifies to this growing vampire fever. Moreover, new media such as newsletters and news broadsheets contributed to the expansion of anecdotes about vampirism, and later entire books and compilations about vampirism appeared. To name just one, *The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola (Die Ehre des Herzogthums Krain)*, published in Lübeck in 1689, is one of the most famous.<sup>38</sup> Such publications do not only present us with almost all of the traits of a classical vampire, they also inspired scholarly interests in vampirism along with an Enlightenment emphasis on examining things in scientific ways. For instance, even Voltaire and Rousseau were fascinated by the boom of vampirism, and they tried to make a connection between vampires and social problems. Voltaire writes,

What! Vampires in our Eighteenth Century? Yes... Tax officials and businessmen who sucked the blood of the people in broad daylight ... These true bloodsuckers did not live in cemeteries, they preferred beautiful places ... Kings are not, properly speaking, vampires. The true vampires are the churchmen who eat at the expense of both the king and the people.<sup>39</sup>

Vampire literature started to flourish even more after the ‘academic’ interest in vampirism was cultivated in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Major authors who became the foundations of vampire literature include Goethe (some elements of his 1832 play *Faust* and his 1797 poem “the Bride of Corinth”), Ludwig Tieck (“Wake Not the Dead!”, 1800), Ernst Hoffmann (his collection *The Serapion Brethren*, 1818), Lord Byron (“The Giaour,” 1813), John Polidori (“The Vampyre,” 1819), and Sheridan Le Fanu (*Carmilla*, 1872). Hence, while Bram Stoker’s 1897 novel *Dracula* provides the iconic image of a vampire, he was nevertheless influenced by the cultural and literary tradition of vampirism preceding him.

## VI. John Polidori’s “The Vampyre”

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38. Germany has provided a large amount of these publications. See Bartlett and Idriceanu, 19.

39. From Voltaire’s *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, see Bartlett and Idriceanu, 20.

John Polidori's short story "The Vampyre" will be my focus here. Today the story is attributed to John Polidori, yet there was a dispute over the originality of this work. The plot of "The Vampyre" was initially conceived by Lord Byron in 1816 during his "ghost story contest" at Villa Diodati on the shores of Lake Geneva, during which Mary Shelley composed her famous *Frankenstein*. While during the meeting Lord Byron started the first chapter of his story about a vampire traveling to Greece, John Polidori, Lord Byron's personal physician, watched him, developed Lord Byron's idea further, finished the story on his own and finally published it in 1819. To attract public attention, the first edition of the story contained an introductory letter "by an anonymous writer describing events at the villa during the summer of 1816, which strongly hinted that the novel was Byron's."<sup>40</sup> Byron was furious and Polidori confessed that he wrote the story based on Byron's groundwork, yet the publisher continued to use Byron's name for profit for a while.

Polidori's story starts in London. Lord Ruthven, one of the two protagonists, is a mysterious aristocratic man who appears at parties yet never creates intimate bonds with people. Aubrey, a young romantic Englishman meets Lord Ruthven and becomes interested in him, since Lord Ruthven excites his romantic imagination. Aubrey accompanies Ruthven to Rome, but leaves him after Ruthven seduces the daughter of a mutual acquaintance. Aubrey then travels to Greece, where he becomes attracted to Ianthe, an innkeeper's daughter. She tells Aubrey about the legends of vampires. Her description of the vampire aligns with the characteristics of Lord Ruthven, yet Aubrey refuses to acknowledge the similarity between Ruthven and the vampire in Ianthe's story. Shortly after, one night Ianthe is killed by a vampire and Aubrey becomes ill. Lord Ruthven arrives at the scene and takes care of Aubrey, and they restore their relationship

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40. Anne Williams, "Introduction," in *Three Vampire Tales*, ed. Anne Williams (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003), 7.

and travel together. During their trip, the pair is attacked by bandits and Ruthven is mortally wounded. Before he dies, Ruthven makes Aubrey swear an oath that he will not mention his death or anything else he knows about Ruthven for a year and a day. Aubrey promised him, yet when he returns to London he finds himself amazed when Ruthven appears shortly thereafter, alive and well. This debilitates Aubrey, and his health becomes worse when he discovers that Lord Ruthven has seduced his sister and made her his fiancé. Ruthven reminds Aubrey of his oath to keep his death a secret, and Aubrey can do nothing but to obey him, not only because he is loyal to his oath, but also because he does not want to defame his sister. Ruthven and Aubrey's sister are engaged to marry on the day the oath ends. Just before he dies, Aubrey finally makes up his mind and writes a letter to his sister revealing Ruthven's history, but it does not arrive in time. Ruthven marries Aubrey's sister. On the wedding night, she is discovered dead, drained of her blood, and Ruthven has vanished.

"The Vampyre" is regarded as the first vampire novel in English. Since Polidori and Lord Byron did not maintain a good relationship after 1816, scholars argue that Polidori plagiarized and created the figure of Lord Ruthven as a "revenge" on Lord Byron. Anne Williams writes,

Polidori not only gave his vampire the by now familiar Byronic demeanor (aristocratic bearing, piercing eyes, and mysterious past), he also called him "Lord Ruthven." De Ruthven was the family name Byron's tempestuous mistress Lady Caroline Lamb had bestowed on her former love in her own Gothic *roman à clef*, *Glenarvon*, published in 1816.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, in some way, Lord Byron himself has become the prototype of the modern European vampire. Moreover, Polidori writes the story as a "revenge" and fashions the vampire as a counterfeit of Lord Byron, and hence it is important for us to decipher the aggressive messages he sends. In my essay, I am interested in interpreting Polidori's text, particularly this structure of

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41. Williams, 8.

emulating the vampire story as a critical moment in the history of romanticism that takes the figure of Lord Byron as a starting point. The following sections will argue that by “blurring” and “queering” Lord Ruthven and Aubrey, Polidori deconstructs the pure, innocent and virtuous imagination of Classical Romanticism, and promotes the dark and unfathomable perversion of Dark Romanticism.

## VII. The Mutual Queer Gazing

The opening paragraph of the story describes Ruthven as a “monstrous” being who is “queer.” Monster theories have described monsters as outsiders and threats for humans, and Polidori writes, “He gazed upon the mirth around him, as if he could not participate therein.” This sentence depicts Lord Ruthven, the vampire, as an outsider. Moreover, Polidori writes, “Apparently, the light laughter of the fair only attracted his attention, that he might by a look quell it, and throw fear into those breasts where thoughtlessness reigned,” portraying Lord Ruthven as different, dangerous and powerful.<sup>42</sup> Here, just like other monsters, Lord Ruthven appears as a threatening outsider. Moreover, his character is also sexually “queer.” Polidori intentionally details Lord Ruthven’s sexual orientation: “it was not that the female sex was indifferent to him: yet such was the apparent caution with which he spoke to the virtuous wife and innocent daughter, that few knew he ever addressed himself to females.”<sup>43</sup> This effort to explain Lord Ruthven’s interest in women indeed lets the readers wonder about the possibility of him being interested in men, of him being homosexual. Furthermore, different from the first description of Lord Ruthven’s “queerness” as an outsider, his second “queer” element starts to

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42. John Polidori, “The Vampyre,” in *Three Vampire Tales*, ed. Anne Williams (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003), 69.

43. Polidori, 69.

open up the possibility for readers to understand him not just as a horrific object, but as an active being who is psychologically complex.

After focusing on the “queerness” of Lord Ruthven, the second paragraph turns to our human protagonist, Aubrey, and describes his desire toward Lord Ruthven. According to the second paragraph, Aubrey becomes obsessed with Lord Ruthven, and Polidori explains that Aubrey is interested in Lord Ruthven because Aubrey “[cultivates] more his imagination than his judgment,” and since his society, which promotes the Enlightenment and science, generally represses excessive imagination, “he soon formed this object into the hero of a romance, and determined to observe the offspring of his fancy, rather than the person before him.”<sup>44</sup> The word “object,” referring to Lord Ruthven, is remarkable. This sentence indicates that Aubrey treats Lord Ruthven, the queer, strange, monstrous being as a romantic object instead of a living subject that has agency. This coincides with the humans’ perception of monsters in monster theories and the interpretations of Shuten Dōji I have mentioned before, and it makes the first description of Lord Ruthven comparable with the figure of Shuten Dōji. The monster is perceived at first as a passive object to fulfill the humans’ projection of their imagination. However, in both texts we also encounter attempts to move beyond this perspective.

Aubrey’s initial interest in Lord Ruthven resonates thus at first with the old dynamic between monsters and humans, yet Polidori creates a “blurring” and, more accurately, a “queering” between them. This has a significant impact on both of them and further demonstrates Lord Ruthven’s, the monster’s active role. The beginning of the second paragraph deserves attention, starting with “About the same time, there came to London [Aubrey].”<sup>45</sup> The first paragraph ends with the discussion on Lord Ruthven’s interest in women quoted before, and the phrase “at the

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44. Polidori, 69-70.

45. Polidori, 69.

same time” juxtaposes Lord Ruthven’s desire, potentially his sexual desire, with the existence of Aubrey. This suggests a connection, even a sexual connection between them. Moreover, after the second paragraph introduces Aubrey, the third paragraph starts with another significant phrase: “He watched him.”<sup>46</sup> Although based on context, we know that the subject is likely to be Aubrey and the object is Lord Ruthven, the ambiguity caused by these two juxtaposed masculine pronouns seems to suggest a mutual watching. Syntactically the subject “he” can also be Lord Ruthven. As Aubrey demonstrates strong interest in Lord Ruthven and asks to accompany him on his trip in Europe, Lord Ruthven also shows his interest in Aubrey, paying him attention which he has never paid to women: “[Lord Ruthven] became acquainted with [Aubrey], paid him attention, and so far advanced upon his notice, that his presence was always recognized.”<sup>47</sup> The phrase “always recognized” supports the notion of mutual watching suggested by the opening phrase and marks the difference between Aubrey and those women Lord Ruthven meets at parties. Here, instead of a passive object, Lord Ruthven has more agency, and the readers become aware of Lord Ruthven’s contribution to the queering between him and Aubrey, a negotiation both of them desire.

In the story, the queering between Lord Ruthven and Aubrey is interrupted and restored, and those two moments illustrate what is being negotiated and reshaped, namely romantic imagination itself. Aubrey is a romantic young man who has pure and virtuous expectations for the world, yet Lord Ruthven is interested in letting his victims “be hurled from the pinnacle of unsullied virtue, down to the lowest abyss of infamy and degradation.”<sup>48</sup> In other words, Lord Ruthven wants to pollute the ‘pure’ romantic imagination and replace it with a glimpse of the perverse and dark reality of desire. Aubrey first decides to leave Lord Ruthven when his fantastic

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46. Polidori, 70.

47. Polidori, 70.

48. Polidori, 72.

imagination of Lord Ruthven is damaged by Lord Ruthven's evil deeds of seducing a young woman: "Losing no time, he entered the apartment of Lord Ruthven, and abruptly asked him his intentions with respect to the lady, informing him at the same time that he was aware of his being about to meet her that very night."<sup>49</sup> This passage first demonstrates Aubrey's shock when he realizes the reality of Lord Ruthven's desires, yet secondly, it also implies Aubrey's attachment to Lord Ruthven, since Aubrey's anger here can also be read as jealousy.

The relationship between the two, in other words, Aubrey's romantic imagination of Lord Ruthven is only restored after Ianthe's death. In fact, the character of Ianthe can be understood as a substitute of Lord Ruthven for Aubrey, a romantic object: "[Aubrey] found himself more and more attached to the almost fairy form before him" ("fairy form" here refers to Ianthe).<sup>50</sup> Ianthe is killed by a vampire shortly after she tells Aubrey about the vampire, who seems to be Lord Ruthven. Lord Ruthven takes care of Aubrey after Aubrey is shocked by Ianthe's death, and this close attendance eliminates Aubrey's suspicion that Lord Ruthven is the evil vampire. In other words, Aubrey's romantic imagination of Lord Ruthven is now restored. The final breakdown of Aubrey's romantic imagination takes place when he realizes that Lord Ruthven is still alive and has seduced his sister. When he sees Lord Ruthven's true identity with his own eyes, his romantic imagination is finally replaced by the dire reality, and specifically the dark reality of desire that kills Aubrey.

### **VIII. Queering and Dark Romanticism**

The "queering" between Lord Ruthven and Aubrey is essentially an intensive perversion that deconstructs Aubrey's romantic imagination, and this can be interpreted in terms of the

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49. Polidori, 72.

50. Polidori, 75



historical development of Romanticism and its subgenre Dark Romanticism. To characterize Dark Romanticism and articulate the difference between it and classical Romanticism, G. R. Thompson writes,

Fallen man's inability fully to comprehend haunting reminders of another, supernatural realm that yet seemed not to exist, the constant perplexity of inexplicable and vastly metaphysical phenomena, a propensity for seemingly perverse or evil moral choices that had no firm or fixed measure or rule, and a sense of nameless guilt combined with a suspicion the external world was a delusive projection of the mind—these were major elements in the vision of man the Dark Romantics opposed to the mainstream of Romantic thought.<sup>51</sup>

When Aubrey is first introduced, Polidori characterizes him as someone who embraces “high romantic feeling of honor and candor,” and “[believes] all to sympathize with virtue.”<sup>52</sup> Another trait of Aubrey we have just analyzed is that he treats Lord Ruthven as his romantic object and, in other words, believes in his agency over his imagination. Aubrey's Romanticism demonstrates traits opposite to Dark Romanticism, and hence he falls under the “the mainstream of Romantic thought” described by Thompson. On the other hand, for Aubrey, Lord Ruthven is unfathomable, “[requiring] ... that his victim, the partner of his guilt, should be hurled from the pinnacle of unsullied virtue, down to the lowest abyss of infamy and degradation.” Hence, by seducing him, Lord Ruthven contributes to the “blurring” between him and Aubrey, and Aubrey loses control over his imagination—instead of being an object of Aubrey's imagination, Lord Ruthven has an agency that takes over Aubrey. In other words, Aubrey fails precisely because he fails to recognize the monstrous figure's subjectivity and specific agency. Aubrey, sticking with the classic romanticized imagination, fails precisely because he fails to recognize Lord Ruthven's agency. Thompson's description of Dark Romanticism accurately captures Aubrey's suffering, namely that

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51. G. R. Thompson, “Introduction: Romanticism and the Gothic Tradition,” in *The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism*, ed. G.R. Thompson (Washington State University, 1974), 5.

52. Polidori, 70.

he is “[unable]” to “comprehend haunting reminders of [Lord Ruthven]” and is plagued by “perverse or evil moral choices” made by Lord Ruthven. Lord Ruthven is the imagination that Aubrey cannot control or, to put it more clearly, the very desire in its darkness that drives the imagination beyond the fiction of romantic control. Hence, the “blurring” between the two protagonists could be understood as Aubrey’s desire for the “blurring” of imagination and reality, which finally kills him since it does not allow for a control of the desire that inhabits the imagination anymore.

## **IX. Conclusion**

The sexually “queer” relationship between Lord Ruthven and Aubrey definitely also deserves attention. Instead of moving too deep into a discussion of the perception of homosexuality in Europe during the nineteenth-century, I want to understand it as an intense form of ‘perversion,’ that is, as something different from the normal, pure and virtuous affection between Aubrey and Ianthe. Hence, Aubrey’s initial interest in Lord Ruthven can be understood as his desire for perversion, or in other words, the darkness within himself and the darkness of desire that he is unconscious of, and that maybe entails his desire to give up his agency. This again, is part of the characteristics of Dark Romanticism. Based on this, Lord Ruthven becomes a figure that can evoke Aubrey’s realization of himself and the reality, a reality in which Lord Ruthven and Aubrey are “blurred” and “queered,” and “[Lord Ruthven is] the monster who had so long influenced his life.”<sup>53</sup> Based on the plot, Lord Ruthven occupies Aubrey’s life, which is itself a sign of a completed “blurring.” Through this “queering,” Lord Ruthven takes over Aubrey’s life and Aubrey realizes the perverse reality that Lord Ruthven embodies.

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53. Polidori, 83.

In other words, similar to the story of Shuten Dōji and Yorimitsu, in “The Vampyre,” Aubrey’s world and Lord Ruthven’s world also become one after their “blurring.” In both cases, “blurring” challenges the human characters’ ordinary understandings, and in this challenge the characteristic traits become visible weaknesses and drives that actually underlie the structure of the ordinary world. For Aubrey his weakness is the romantic imagination itself, and for Yorimitsu it is his ideology of legitimacy. More importantly, in both stories, this recognition depends on the fact that monsters are not passive outsiders or others. Instead, they represent and embody a specific agency that negates and undermines the relations depicted by certain monster theories stating that the monsters are passive outsiders and others. In drawing attention to the fact that monsters and humans do become one, and to the ways of how the borders blur and why they blur, these stories offer us insight into questions of desire and legitimacy, but also of the distribution of power in the social and historical contexts the stories were written in. Anthropocentric interpretations of the story of Shuten Dōji and of “The Vampyre” have failed to notice this.

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