

An Insight Through Netflix's *Castlevania* Focusing on Feminist Ideology



Season 1 poster of *Castlevania*

On September 26, 1986, the first *Castlevania* game was released. It was a gothic horror, action-adventure game about vampires and vampire hunters. It became a fan favorite and led to several versions of spin off, including the Netflix series that was released on July 7, 2017. The animated series follows Trevor Belmont, Adrian Fahrenheit Tȑepeř (Alucard), and Sypha Belnades as they go on a journey to protect Wallachia from Dracula and his vampire minions. The show is extremely well animated and written, dealing with darker themes, and juggling several complicated characters. One thing the show does very well is writing out female characters and exploring their storylines. The story takes place in 1476, showing female

characters with “masculine” characteristics and how they were treated in a time of vampires and magic.

The show starts with Lisa Tpeş knocking on Dracula’s castle door. Lisa knew the risk of knocking on Dracula’s door, yet she did it to pursue knowledge that only Dracula knows. Lisa came to his castle and risked being eaten by a vampire to learn medical knowledge and become a doctor. However, Lisa makes it known while talking to Dracula that the seek for knowledge is not a praised thing during this time, especially if you’re a woman. “Don’t mistake me for a witch. Everybody out there already does that. I believe in science,” this line is one of the first things that Lisa says to Dracula (Deats). This line shows that Lisa is criticized even in her own village for seeking knowledge that could potentially save people in her village. She is outcast and turns to a literal vampire for help because she is still determined to help people and learn more. Eventually, Dracula is charmed by Lisa and agrees to teach her how to become a doctor. However, after this scene, the show cuts to a witch burning. The “witch” burning is Lisa. Lisa was condemned by the church of witchcraft after finding out about her medical practice, so they sentenced her to burn to death. After she burns, the audience learns that during her time studying under Dracula, she married Dracula and had a family with him. When Dracula learns of Lisa’s death he appears before the church and shouts, “that woman was the only reason on earth for me to tolerate human life!” (Deats). He then goes on to declare the destruction of humankind by his demonic army, all to avenge the death of his wife. Lisa’s death was the catalyst that starts the series off, all because of her seeking for more knowledge.

The search for knowledge, especially in the Middle Ages, is seen as more of a “masculine trait”, since it was believed that men were seen to be better than their female counterparts. So, to

have a women character portray this masculine trait and be victimized for it shows what it was like for women that were like Lisa. A woman who is seen as powerful or knowing too much is seen as a danger to society, so they are classified as a witch and need to be taken care of. So, it can be assumed that if a male character was to do what Lisa has done, the church would probably have just classified him as a traitor to the church instead of as a witch. The traitor may still be put to death like Lisa, but rarely is a man burned at the stake and classified as a witch. Lisa was not an evil character. She was a character who was brave enough to go against a vampire lord in the pursuit of knowledge that could help humanity. Even when she is burning at the stake her last words is a plea to Dracula to spare humanity. As Dracula said, "Lisa Țepeș was a woman of science," who only wanted to help and was outcast as a witch for being different from her fellow women.

Although Lisa dies within the first ten minutes of the series, she is not the only female character that portrays masculine traits. Sypha Belnades is known as a scholar since she is part of a clan of people called Speakers. Speakers are a nomadic group of scholars who maintain oral stories and traditions of Wallachia, they also go around and offer aid to whoever needs it. They are peaceful people that are made up mostly of men, so that immediately makes Sypha seem like an outcast to the outside eye. Just like Lisa, Sypha is seen as an outcast because she is a woman seeking knowledge, but at least Sypha has her people by her side. Sypha is a lot like Lisa and wants to use her knowledge to help people, even when they would rather her people be killed. When Sypha and her people arrive in the town, Gresit, they are immediately shunned by the people because the church has made the town folks believe that the Speakers are the reason for Dracula's wrath. Even when the people essentially hate Speakers, Sypha and her people still cannot bring themselves to leave these peoples. When Trevor Belmont comes and warns the

Speakers about an angry mob that is forming, he tells them to leave this city to avoid being killed. However, Sypha's response to the threat is "I don't think we can leave these people, not in their time of need!" (Deats).

Sypha has the stubbornness as Lisa, the willingness to help others no matter what the cost, even if it costs them their lives. The need to help others can be seen as more of a feminine trait since they are seen as a caretaker. Especially since they were willing to risk their lives to help save others. For example, Sypha and her people came to Gresit to look for a sleeping soldier. The soldier is said to be the only person who can stop Dracula and his demon army, so the Speakers take a chance on finding him. Sypha goes by herself in the catacombs to look for this sleeping soldier, so she would not put any of her people at risk in the hunt for this legend. Unfortunately, she ends up being turned to stone by a cyclops that protects the catacombs, so she is unable to find the sleeping soldier. Yet, this still shows how she is a caretaker. She risked her own life to protect her people and find a way to protect even more people from danger. Even if that is considered a relatively normal "feminine" trait, she is still seen as an outcast because of her more "masculine" traits.

Besides her endless pursuit for knowledge and being the only female in her group of Speaker, she is also a magician. When a woman is intelligent, she is already seen as a threat, yet when you add magic to it, she is a danger to society. Sypha uses her magic in front of the townsfolk to help Trevor from being attacked. Immediately the people of the church scream at her and call her a witch, she responds with "No! I am a Speaker and a scholar of magic. I serve no demon and I do no evil" (Deats). She uses her magic only for good and tries to help people when the demon army comes to kill everyone in the town. The people still clearly hate her yet

still accept her help because without her help, they would be defenseless. As soon as she is done saving these people, they could instantly turn on her and put her to death just like Lisa. However, Sypha does not care about protecting her own life, she just wants to protect and help others who cannot protect themselves. Lisa and Sypha both portray selflessness throughout their appearances in the show, and that can be seen as a masculine trait during this time.

The creators of this series created strong female characters that would fit in the modern day perfectly, but they are labeled as outcasts and witches in their current time. When making the plot for the show, the creators had to think about how to make the female characters relatable to the modern day, while also making them have traits that would make them different back in 1476. Most of the traits that were considered masculine long ago, can now be considered more of an ambiguous trait. It's normal for female characters to seek knowledge, to be selfless, even be a magic user without being seen as a more masculine character because of it. Most of the time, these characters are not considered outcasts because of these traits in modern stories. They can still be outcasts in these stories, but it will be because of masculine traits. So, by portraying Lisa and Sypha with these traits, they became relatable characters in modern day, but also show how different life was for females (and female characters) back in a time of chaos and dismay.

Netflix's Castlevania is an animated series that features vampires, vampire hunters, and strong female characters. These female characters are shunned and called witches, all because they are different. They are different because they are portraying more masculine traits of that time, which was unheard of back then. Back then, if a woman is seen to be more powerful than a man, then she must be a witch or a servant of the devil who has come to disrupt their very way of life. *Castlevania* showed how bad it was back then by showing Lisa Țepeș being burned at the

stake within the first ten minutes of the show. Even though Lisa was killed off in the first ten minutes, Sypha Belnades was still able to provide a strong female character that fought for the same things that Lisa fought for. Traits that were considered masculine long ago are no longer considered to be just masculine, which means that female characters can have these traits without being outcast for it. Female characters that do not belong in stories that take place long ago, fit in perfectly with modern day female characters because they share the same traits that would make them seem different in another time.

Work Cited

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