

# SCIENCE, FOLKLORE, AND ECOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGES IN AOYAMA'S *DETECTIVE CONAN* ANIME

CIENCIA, FOLCLORE Y ECOLOGÍA DE SABERES EN EL ANIME *DETECTIVE CONAN* DE AOYAMA

SCIENCE, FOLKLORE ET ÉCOLOGIE DES SAVOIRS CHEZ L'ANIMÉ *DÉTECTIVE CONAN* D'AOYAMA

CIENCIA, FOLCLORE E ECOLOGIA DOS SABERES NA ANIME *DETECTIVE CONAN* DO AOYAMA

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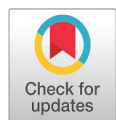
## ABSTRACT

During the Anthropocene, science and folklore have been efficient explanatory models of the world. However, numerous studies suggest a convergence of both perspectives in contemporary mass media productions, being Japanese animation a clear example. The aim of the research presented here was to analyse how science and folklore are integrated and opposed in Aoyama's *Detective Conan*, an anime where cases often happen in rural Japan and where folk references confront Conan's detective reasoning. To reach this objective, a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative study of the presence of folklore in this work—through aspects such as characterisation or narratives—was conducted in 75 cases and over 155 episodes which include references to folklore in their background, plot, or characters. The analysis revealed that, when folklore and science interact, rational thinking is usually preferred over folk beliefs; characters are stereotyped according to their genre or origins; and, more importantly, supernatural beliefs can be included in detective fiction without being ridiculed by the most rational characters.

**Keywords:** ecology of knowledges, *Detective Conan*, Japanese animation, detective fiction, folklore, mass media

## RESUMEN

En el Antropoceno, ciencia y folclor se han considerado modelos eficaces para explicar el mundo. Asimismo, numerosos estudios apuntan a una convergencia de ambas perspectivas en las producciones contemporáneas de los medios de comunicación de masas, entre las que sobresale el anime japonés. El objetivo del presente artículo es analizar cómo se integran y oponen la ciencia y el folclore en *Detective Conan*, de Aoyama, un anime donde muchos casos se desarrollan en el Japón rural y donde las referencias tradicionales confrontan el raciocinio detectivesco de Conan. Para lograr este objetivo, se ha realizado un amplio estudio cualitativo y cuantitativo de la presencia del folclore en esta obra a través de aspectos como la caracterización o las narrativas presentes en 75 casos y alrededor de 155 episodios que incluyen referencias al folclore, en el contexto, la trama o los



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personajes. El análisis reveló que, cuando el folclore y la ciencia interactúan, por lo general el pensamiento racional se impone sobre las creencias tradicionales; los personajes son estereotipados según su género o sus orígenes; y, lo más importante, las creencias sobrenaturales pueden incluirse en la ficción detectivesca sin ser ridiculizadas por los personajes más racionales.

**Palabras clave:** ecología de saberes, *Detective Conan*, anime japonés, ficción detectivesca, folclore, medios de masas

## RÉSUMÉ

Dans l'Anthropocène, la science et le folklore ont été considérés comme des modèles efficaces pour expliquer le monde. De même, des nombreuses études indiquent une convergence des deux perspectives dans les productions contemporaines des médias de masse, parmi lesquels l'anime japonais se distingue. L'objectif de cet article est d'analyser la manière dont la science et le folklore s'intègrent et s'opposent dans le *Détective Conan* d'Aoyama, un animé qui se déroule souvent dans le Japon rural et où les références traditionnelles sont confrontées au raisonnement du détective Conan. Pour atteindre cet objectif, une étude qualitative et quantitative approfondie de la présence du folklore dans cette oeuvre a été réalisée à travers des aspects tels que la caractérisation ou les récits présents dans 75 cas et environ 155 épisodes qui incluent des références au folklore, dans le contexte, l'intrigue ou les personnages. L'analyse a révélé que, lorsque le folklore et la science interagissent, la pensée rationnelle l'emporte généralement sur les croyances traditionnelles. Les personnages sont stéréotypés en fonction de leur sexe ou de leur origine et, surtout, les croyances surnaturelles peuvent être incluses dans la fiction policière sans être ridiculisées par les personnages plus rationnels.

**Mots clef:** écologie des savoirs, *Détective Conan*, animé japonais, fiction policière, folklore, médias de masse

## RESUMO

Durante o Antropoceno, a ciência e o folclore têm servido eficazmente como modelos para explicar o mundo. No entanto, numerosos estudos indicam uma convergência de ambas as perspectivas nas produções contemporâneas dos meios de comunicação de massas; um exemplo claro disso é a anime japonesa. O objetivo deste artigo foi analisar a forma como a ciência e o folclore se integram e se opõem no *Detective Conan* de Aoyama, um anime que se passa, em muitos casos, no Japão rural e onde as referências tradicionais confrontam o raciocínio do Detetive Conan. Para atingir este objetivo, foi realizado um extenso estudo qualitativo e quantitativo da presença do folclore nesta obra, através de aspectos como a caracterização ou a narrativa, em 75 casos e mais de 155 episódios que incluem referências ao folclore no contexto, enredo ou personagens. A análise revelou que, quando o folclore e a ciência interagem, o pensamento racional geralmente prevalece sobre as crenças tradicionais; as personagens são estereotipadas de acordo com o seu gênero ou origem; e, mais importante, as crenças sobrenaturais podem ser incluídas na ficção policial sem serem ridicularizadas pelas personagens mais racionais.

**Palavras chave:** ecologia dos saberes, *Detective Conan*, anime japonesa, ficção policial, folclore, meios de comunicação de massas

## Introduction

According to Boaventura de Sousa's *Ecology of Knowledges* (2010), traditional knowledge is mercilessly being colonised, which implies that scientific rationality makes individuals avoid the use of folkloric references and mythical thought. Likewise, numerous studies not focused on said theory suggest a convergence of science and folklore in contemporary mass media productions, being Japanese animation (*anime*) one of the clearest examples of this phenomenon (Ogáyar-Marín & Ojeda-García, 2016, pp. 112–113). However, it must be noticed that both perspectives are not equally represented, being rationality (i.e. science) most characters' desirable way of thinking.

Mystery seems to be an intrinsic part of folklore, given that folktales and myths have been used for centuries to try to understand the *inexplicable*. In the same vein, recent research (Sari & Putra, 2020; Hunter, 2020) points to an undeniable correlation between folklore and ecology, highlighting traditional lore as a powerful tool to raise awareness on nature conservation, which reinforces “the idea that folkloric traditions can bring us into physical (rather than purely intellectual) connection with the environment” (Hunter, 2020, p. 224). Moreover, detective fiction—a genre related to the *inexplicable*—has often included folk elements in its narratives to confront the irrational by presenting objective, rational evidence.

Considering the above, the aim of this research was to analyse how science and folklore were integrated and opposed in an *anime* with detective fiction as its core: *Detective Conan* (hereunder, DC). This work tells the story of a teen detective, Shinichi Kudō, who inadvertently discovers a criminal organisation and is attacked by one of its members, who feeds him a poison. However, Shinichi does not die; instead, his body turns into one of a six-year-old child. To hide his identity, he decides to go undercover as Conan Edogawa, a junior detective that solves all kinds of cases in the

hope that one of them will involve the criminals that hurt him so he could bring them to justice.

This *anime* was created by the Japanese artist Gōshō Aoyama (Hokuei, 1963) as a manga story in 1994 and adapted as a TV animated series in 1996; since then, new episodes have been broadcast every week, amounting to more than 1,000 in 2023. Thus, a comprehensive qualitative study of the presence of folklore in this work has been conducted.

The innovative nature of this work lies on the fact that the ecology of knowledges is mostly studied from a theoretical perspective, so this article would be the first project where Sousa's theory is used to define the scope of a research project and where Japanese animation is taken as the main core of an empirical study. In fact, Hatfield (2010) refers to Sousa's theory in relation to Comic Studies, but this idea is not further developed; the author simply mentions it as an anecdotal reference, that is, because it is cited in another theoretical work.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this work comprises two key aspects. On one hand, the notion known as “ecology of knowledges,” proposed by Boaventura de Sousa, is explained with a decolonizing perspective in mind and the Anthropocene as its operational framework. On the other hand, the correlation between folklore and the pairing *anime–detective fiction* is explored in the light of both classic and recent bibliography.

### Ecology of Knowledges

To speak about the Anthropocene means to speak about the traces the humankind has left in the world and, by extension, about the multiple paths that humans have historically followed to achieve their notions of *civilisation*. Thus, the Anthropocene should be considered an allusion to the plurality of human knowledges, which have been contextually and socially built to generate different worldviews,

to understand the world, to question the forces of nature, and to modify the environment to adapt it to humans' necessities. However, the path to civilisation has been monopolised by Western societies, turning their historical landmarks into the major milestones of a deeply Eurocentric world history. Therefore, the West colonised the history of humanity, othering and overshadowing the existing variety of histories. This is evidenced by contemporary Western thinking having become the dominant, unequivocal way of understanding rationality and reasoning all over the world (Wolf, 2023, p. 17).

The globally-imposed Western mindset produced a deep Cartesian ontological rupture, separating rationality from the world (Lander, 2000, pp. 15–16). Thereupon, the world has lost its meaning and can only be understood through the conceptual and representational abstraction provided by reason. This ontological rupture becomes the only path to modernity, emphasised by the development and implementation of an objective science. Concurrently, it is part of a colonial shaping of the world, where the hegemony of the West *otherises* any society whose knowledges are opposed to its own reasoning or not yet colonised by it.

This “colonisation of knowledges” ends in a devastating process of differentiation, where social reality is divided, favouring the West. The Non-West and the West are radically separated into two by “abyssal lines” (Sousa, 2014, p. 21), which separate social reality in two different universes, one on each side of this dividing line. Thus, this line is converted into an epistemological border, meaning that what is found on our side of this borderline becomes the only reality. By contrast, what is on the other side becomes non-existent, inaccurate, and invalid. In this regard, non-Western ways of thinking are in the ‘marginalised’ side of this dichotomy. This perspective is useful to understand how knowledges are divided, given that postulates on the world-system configuration permeate them, resulting in political, economic, and ideological centres, peripheries,

and semi-peripheries. Other reformulations, such as Lander’s (2000), state that Eurocentrism affects the construction of subjectivities, knowledge, and truth to the extent that geographical centres of power are legitimised as centres of production and control of knowledge. Certainly, this also applies to media and literary productions.

As stated, the Anthropocene is a new geological epoch focused on the human impact on different natural and social contexts throughout history. From this perspective, the European conquest of the American continent or the Industrial Revolution are examples of how the misnamed “drive of human civilisation” affects the environment as well as other non-European human groups. Consequently, decolonial critique relies on the Anthropocene to also analyse how knowledge-creating entities are lost, as the ontological nature/society separation applies—following the principles of Otherness—to non-Western societies in terms of savage/civilised or underdeveloped/developed. This dichotomy influences how the world and its reality are understood, resulting in the *traditional knowledge vs. scientific knowledge* binomial.

Thus, the Anthropocene is characterised by a variety of knowledges beyond rational and scientific method. Based on myths, folklore and popular knowledge, these ways of understanding the world are rich and various. Still, they are usually stigmatised, considered uncivilised, and usually consigned to oblivion. Otherness is seen as a collateral damage of colonisation, an amoral territory based on incomprehension (Massó, 2020, pp. 245–246). In opposition to this reality, the *ecology of knowledges*—hereunder, EoK—appears (Sousa, 2014, pp. 40–43).

This contra-epistemological proposal is based on the idea of a global epistemological diversity beyond science reasoning. It refuses the alleged superiority of modern science and relegates it to one of the many types of knowledge existing in the world. At the same time, the EoK strives for

preserving and reviving all the othered knowledges, turning them into potential cognitive alternatives which boost a counterhegemonic globalisation that is based on diversity and does not favour one imposed logic.

### Folklore in *Anime* and Detective Fiction

Following current trends on rejecting lore, folklore is now regarded as an obscure, non-rational understanding, and it is being challenged by detective fiction. Thus, this crime fiction subgenre often includes folk elements to confront the irrational by presenting objective, rational evidence. As a result, detective fiction containing folk references can be considered a new type of hybrid literature reflecting on tradition and scientific progress, which we will call "*Folk detective fiction*."

As proven by researchers such as Slaven (2012) or Miyashita (2017), *anime* "works as a new means of producing folk tales that are inspired in tradition, but also adapted to a contemporary context" (Quintairos-Soliño, 2020a, p. 279). In fact, *anime* could be considered the contemporary format of folktales' dissemination, not only in Japan but worldwide, due to its transnational nature. Martín-Párraga's remarks on the success of folk and fairy tales could explain their parallelism with *anime*. He suggests that oral traditions are well-spread because stories could be invented by ordinary people who, besides not having an academic training, were not economically conditioned by investors either (2020, p. 149). In other words, given that fairy and folk tales were created by "common" people, then "they were not overly complex" (2020, p. 149).

The simple structure of folktales and the inclusion of common, daily motifs would draw people's attention, especially younger audiences. The same happens with *anime*, which has become "one of the main vehicles of myth in modernity since it synthesises classical myths from all known mythological traditions with daily life and ordinary characters" (Ogáyar-Marín & Ojeda-García, 2016, p. 112; own translation).

Likewise, Borham-Puyal (2020) describes the potential of fairy and folk tales to dialogue "with other forms and matters" (p. 170), while repeatedly sharing the same motifs and tropes although they are presented in different forms. She describes these tales as "shape-shifters [that] transform and become transformative", and she eventually establishes a connection between traditional tales and the noir (p. 170). Martín-Párraga (2020, p. 150) also states that many traditional tales contain extreme violence as a trope, being more disturbing than "the goriest horror movie ever produced".

Although traditional tales are usually well-received by audiences, *anime* has been severely criticised outside Japan because of the outspoken depiction of violent, sexualised, and grotesque scenes included in some of those works. Regardless of how *anime* is received by casual viewers, it cannot be denied that it shares a pattern with traditional stories that goes beyond a mere coincidence.

As suggested, tales do not only share great similarities with *anime*, but also with crime fiction. All of them heavily rely on intertextuality and add *unheimlich* elements that disturb their audiences to some extent. Furthermore, while fairy and folk tales have mutated for centuries (Zipes, 2015; Kunio, 1948, p. xxiv), *anime* explores hybridisation by combining traditional tales and modern genres in a more immediate basis, due to the competitive global market it operates in.

### Method

To do this research, all episodes of DC containing explicit folk references—both supernatural elements and traditional beliefs—from an excerpt comprising the first 470 episodes were selected to be part of the corpus. At this point, the compiled data reached a point of theoretical saturation. After said visual analysis, 75 cases (equivalent to more than 155 episodes out of 470) containing folk references in their background, plot, or characters have been analysed.

By examining structural recurrences in each episode and by verifying the involved characters' level of scepticism, we aim at analysing the shift from mythical thought to exclusively rational thinking. Finally, observing how these cases resolutions revolve around folklore (e.g. creatures, origins of folkloric elements, cultural references, etc.) is also an essential focus of this research. The observed criteria were (1) the plot (who is the legend's narrator?), (2) the characters' scepticism, the folklore references present in (3) backgrounds and (4) elements, (5) the supernatural creatures, (6) quotes, and (7) other references. Thus, whereas criteria 1, 2, and 3 establish the framework where the folktale operates, criteria 4, 5, 6, and 7 help to determine how folk tales or beliefs are being treated in said framework.

To this end, the selected episodes of DC have been directly examined in the light of the following questions: (1) Who is the narrator of the supernatural legend or story?; (2) Which characters are sceptical, and which are not?; (3) How is the supernatural incorporated into the plot?; (4) How do characters interact with the supernatural?; (5) What strategies do characters use to impose rational logic or overcome abyssal thinking?; (6) How is the supernatural included in a story set in the present day?; and (7) Are mythical/supernatural elements treated equally regardless of the society from which they originate? The results should provide room for debating how science and folklore are integrated and opposed in this series.

After the analysis, it was obvious that most cases can be easily classified according to their pattern of folklore use. Given the extent of such study, a paradigmatic selection of the most relevant episodes is presented in this article along with an overview of the results drawn from the macroanalysis.

## Results

Results are organised into two sections. The first is used to introduce a selection of the most paradigmatic cases; the second section is focused

on examining the findings of the qualitative and quantitative analyses.

### The Presence of Folklore in *Detective Conan*

Folklore—understood as the material and immaterial knowledge shared by a group of people and informally transmitted from generation to generation—is present in DC in multiple ways since many cases are based on Japanese folklore to generate the plot, the background, or some characters. However, Greco-Latin myths, Western folklore, and sci-fi or contemporary lore also meet with the Japanese autochthonous belief system.

The qualitative analysis has revealed the existence of three main types of correlation between science and folklore through the narratives, which can be named after the type of dialogue about the EoK they present: (1) dialogues between science and the incomprehensible—where folklore is explained through rational thinking; (2) dialogues between folklore and ecology—where folklore seeks to protect nature; and (3) dialogues between folklore and the figurative—where folklore is transformed into metaphors to operate in a contemporary rational sphere.

To illustrate each one of these “dialogues”, a selection of paradigmatic episodes has been selected per item. In this section, the plot of said cases is briefly described; then, narrative patterns and tropes relevant to the analysis are highlighted. In some cases, a brief discussion on the *rational thinking vs. folk belief* pair takes place to show how the EoK is revealed throughout the plot. Results derived from this study will be further discussed from a quantitative perspective in the next section.

#### a) *Dialogues Between Science and the Incomprehensible*

In this type of dialogue, three distinct categories can be suggested: Japanese, Contemporary, and Western folklore. Both Japanese and Western folklore include references clearly linked to their

traditional folklores, whereas urban legends are part of what is called “*contemporary lore* (i.e. a system of recently emerged beliefs shared by urban communities and whose origins are sometimes difficult to establish due to globalisation).

*Japanese Folklore: The Hidden Lesson*

In *The Solitary Island of the Princess and the Dragon King Palace* (episodes 291–293), a parallelism between the legend of the Onigame (demon turtle) island and an unsolved crime is shown. The legend revolves around a female weaver whose soul (*mabui*) was absorbed by a messenger of the afterlife (*gusō*), who emerged from the sea. Concurrently, the crime deals with the kidnap of a mayor’s daughter in an island similar to Onigame, whose disappearance has been attributed to the *gusō*. The investigation relies on four key aspects: 1) a local legend emphasises that the *gusō* may still be in the island; 2) the legend explains a ritual that protects people from the attack of the *gusō*; 3) the legend offers key information to understand the kidnapping; and 4) the island is surrounded by dangerous water flows that have caused several deaths, which would connect to the deadly legend. Once a murder happens in the island, the detectives Conan and Heiji establish the legend as an inspirational source for the crime. Thus, using logical deductions, they obtain a rational explanation that helps the non-sceptical characters reject speculations based on supernatural causes.

The Onigame’s legend is grounded on an authentic myth. The *gusō*, a soul-taker creature, is very common in Japanese folklore under the appearance of an *oni* (demon, ogre) or a *yōkai* (monster, goblin). This folktale also has a very specific feature of myths, that is, the pedagogical function. The use of the tale to curse the island makes the locals perceive it as a forbidden place—something reasonable due to the island being surrounded by deadly waterflows. Also, the ritual to protect oneself from the *gusō* by placing a knife between one’s teeth has useful origins since it helped female

weavers to avoid being strangled with a rope from behind (when an attacker tried to put a rope around their necks, they could easily cut it with the knife).

*The Urban Legend: A Contemporary Background*

Another paradigmatic case is *The Truth of the Haunted House* (episodes 274–275). In this case, the folklore is contemporary, close to an urban legend or a ghost story, and the plot is about an old building presumably haunted by the ghost of a girl (*yūrei*) murdered years before. The only neighbours are a medical student, a filmmaker, a fan of scary movies, and an old man. All of them explain the paranormal activities they have experienced to Conan and his companions, providing different explanations to the phenomena. Thus, the medical student is sceptical and relies on scientific hypotheses, whereas the others encourage the supernatural discourse. Conan tries to discover the scientific logic behind the events, while his friend Ran automatically embraces the urban legend, assimilating it as true. Ran’s father, Detective Kogoro Mōri, is torn between the scepticism and the paranormal explanation.

The case background is based on Japanese horror movies, with the ghost of a brutally murdered girl as the protagonist. During the case, all the characters fall asleep in front of a TV; and when the light of the device awakens Ran, she sees a ghostly girl on the screen—an obvious allusion to the Japanese film *The Ring* (*Ringu*, 1998). This case represents a dialogue between reason and folklore that is clung to contemporary superstitions and beliefs—most of them related to fears derived from horror movies.

Again, Conan makes the scientific reasoning prevail and, looking for what he usually refers to as “the only truth”, he finds out that the paranormal activity is due to optical illusions and chemicals. The reason behind these phenomena is that the accomplice of the girl’s murderer wants the

neighbours to leave the place because the killer has been hiding there for two years and could be recognised by them, who witnessed the crime.

*The Western Inspiration*

Western folklore is very present in DC, as it is evidenced by cases such as *Magic lovers murder case* (episodes 132–134 or *A Cursed Masked Coldly Laughs*, episode 184). In this regard, the *Dracula's Villa Murder Case* (episodes 88–89) is not only the first case completely set in a Western-inspired environment, but the one which best encompasses the features attributed to this type of folk episodes.

First, it is important to note that the narrator of Dracula's legend is a researcher, who links the myth to historical facts: science is being used to explain fiction and popular beliefs, which confers authenticity to the tale. Moreover, the case revolves around Torakura Daisuke, a writer and fan of Dracula who lives in a villa full of collector's items about vampires and who is found dead on a cross with a stake on his heart.

Furthermore, Torakura's name is an approximate transcription into Japanese of "Dracula" (pronounced *Do-ra-ku-ra*), and his villa is a recreation of the Villa Diodati, where Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* and John Polidori, *The Vampyre*. These writers were forced to stay inside the village due to poor weather (Perrottet, 2011), and likewise, the protagonists of this case must stay in the villa because of a snowstorm. Yet the parallelisms go further. Before dying, Torakura is seen drinking red wine—a metaphor of blood—and watching a movie about vampires; after dying, it is discovered that he had wrongfully taken advantage of people by draining their energy as vampires drain people's blood.

These characters (except for Detective Kogoro Mōri and his daughter, Ran) do not believe in vampires; as stated before, they acknowledge a parallelism between the myth and the historical facts, but they are sure the crime was not

committed by a vampire even when there are no footprints on the snow surrounding the locked room where Torakura was murdered. Nevertheless, when the body is found, Conan wonders, "Could it be possible that the culprit flew like a real vampire?" Yet, it is only a cliffhanger. Thus, Conan describes Torakura as a vampire but also compares the killer (his ghost-writer, Tadokoro) with Stoker's creature in stating, "They say that, when a vampire sucks someone's blood, the victim also becomes a vampire. [...] Tadokoro got worse than that: after all, he became a killer." Therefore, Conan is using a myth to explain contemporary events and behaviours, and more importantly, he is transforming the legend into a contemporary fable with a moral.

Once the investigation is over, Kogoro is offered a new case at the Franken Manor. When he mentions his client is Furano Genso, a doctor in Engineering who works on "weird experiments at night", Ran mistakenly thinks the name is "Frankenstein" (*Furankenshutain*) due to its similar pronunciation and complains about it. Then, Conan mentions, "If the next case had a werewolf, this would be complete." As it can be inferred, Conan establishes a triad of classical Western monsters composed by Dracula (or vampires), Frankenstein, and werewolves.

Beyond coincidences, this trio of monsters will be recurrent in many cases depicting Western folklore, being *Head-to-Head Match with the... Black Organization: A Dual Mystery on a Full Moon Night* (episode 345) the most prominent as the key character is a werewolf along with a vampire, Medusa, and other monsters. Including these creatures in several cases shows how characters react to them; thus, Ran is always scared of all type of monsters, whether they are autochthonous or foreign. However, almost all the adult characters are not frightened when encountering Western monsters, and most of them do not believe in Western folklore, as it can be seen in *Magic Lover's Murder Case* (episodes 132–134) or *The Old Blue Castle Investigation Case* (episodes 136–137).



### b) Dialogues Between Folklore and Ecology

Humans' impact on the environment is reflected in many episodes where folklore and ecology meet. Hence, it is very common that a secondary dialogic connection emerges from this *anime's* EoK. This dialogue is usually related to the murderer's motive, and it becomes an allegation against a social reality where natural landscapes are cruelly transformed in artificial spaces (i.e. rezoning protected areas, property speculation, mass tourism, etc.).

Although these crimes are deeply related to ecologist motives and their culprits are heavily reprimanded by the detectives, ecology is never mentioned. Samsuddin (2019) offers an explanation to this phenomenon by stating that "literary ecology works in an indirect preservation of nature. It works through stories that are packaged in such a way as to lead the reader to an understanding of the importance of preserving nature" (p. 24). Therefore, DC's episodes where ecology is a main theme could be considered not only part of the EoK, but also part of literary ecology.

*The Entrance to the Maze. The Anger of the Colossus* (episode 208) is an emblematic case. The protagonists are invited to the inaugural act of a cableway that goes through a sacred mountain sculpted in the form of a colossal goddess, protector of the natural enclave. The alteration of the mountain to install a cableway is considered an offense against the deity, and the locals fear her retaliation. The divine punishment finally happens when all the people involved in the construction die in impossible situations that seem to be caused by the angry goddess. Although Conan finally proves that the culprit is a human who used the legend to elaborate a sophisticated trick that made the crime seem impossible, their deaths may still be imputed to the power of the goddess, who punished them for destroying a protected natural area.

A relevant character of this episode is an old nun who tells the myth to Conan. According to her,

in ancient times, those who once disrespected the goddess painfully died, which means that the people who built the cableway have been cursed by the deity. As explained above, DC can be related to literary ecology, and the fact that an old nun is the narrator of the folktale seems to prove this connection. As Samsuddin (2019, p. 25) states, "literary ecology can be traced through folklore that is passed down from generation to generation." Thus, an older generation (represented by the nun) is passing a local myth to a younger one (represented by Conan) to ensure that new generations know the significance of the place and try to protect it from avaricious individuals.

One of the key scenes of this case also reflects on the struggle between folklore/ecology and modernity/capitalism. Thus, when a journalist complains about the tunnel crossing the sacred mountain, the developer claims: "Don't you think I am very religious? Floods of tourists will come to pray both to the goddess and the 500 *rakan* statues. I think she should be thankful and avoid cursing me." Just after blaspheming, there is a blackout, and the developer is attacked. When there is light again, he has disappeared, and a talisman with the word *Ingaōhō* (karma) is stuck on the window. Although it is obvious that the developer was attacked by a human, the talisman is directly linking the crime to the legend. It could be argued that, if capitalism leads to the destruction of nature, then folklore, through its ecological strand, will protect the local environment by negatively influencing the future of those who intentionally harm it.

In the same vein, *The Water Palace of Five Colours Legend* (episodes 210–211) and *The Legend of the Mysterious Five Storied Pagoda* (episodes 159–160) also contain a comparable dialogue between folklore and ecology. The former revolves around ancient times, when a man built a tearoom in the middle of a sacred lake. Infuriated, the spirit of the lake took revenge on the man by killing him. Back to the present,

Conan and his companions visit that tearoom, which has been recently revamped by the actual owner. Shortly after hearing about this story, the owner's dead body is found inside the tearoom in a way that resembles the folktale. The latter case is about a cursed pagoda that forces any person who harms its natural space to commit suicide. Several cases have happened in ancient times, so monks warn visitors about it, preserving the legend. Once there, Conan learns that there is an urbanisation project in process to promote tourism, which will affect the pagoda and its surroundings. The developer does not care about the legend; however, he is soon found dead, hanging from the pagoda, so most of the characters think it is due to the legend being real.

As stated, in all these cases, folklore helps the locals to preserve the environment. In this vein, nature is protected by traditional lore, whereas scientific logics (e.g. promoting tourism to reactivate the local economy) could lead to harm the space, the villagers' most precious good. Thus, these episodes are a clear example of how the EoK operates, showing how both sides of the abyssal line meet. All the folk elements are activated during the narration and explained by Conan with logical arguments. The *only truth* shows that all crimes, despite their supernatural aura, are caused by humans. Nevertheless, folklore proves that, in most cases, the motive is none other than protecting the natural world.

During the analysis, only one exception could be found. In episodes 222 to 224, *And there were no mermaids* transports the audience to a small island where Shimabukuro, a 130-year-old woman, lives. The legend says she ate a mermaid when she was younger and thus became immortal. To acknowledge this miracle, the locals celebrate a festival in Shimabukuro's honour, where she raffles three arrows which contain a strand of her hair and are believed to bring good luck to their owners. Applying a scientific logic, the detectives Conan and Heiji explain that dugongs were considered mermaids in ancient Japan, which would justify the mermaid myth—the arrows being just a folk token. However, impossible murders involving

sea water, scales, sacred arrows, and an absence of footprints start to happen, and everyone attribute them to a mermaid. Conan and Heiji investigate the cases and discover that the culprit is Kimie, Shimabukuro's great-granddaughter.

In fact, Shimabukuro never existed: she had been a character created by Kimie's female ancestors, who disguised themselves as the immortal lady to provide the island with an attractive myth that appeal people from mainland Japan. Years ago, Kimie's friends tried to burn Shimabukuro to test if she was immortal. The old lady survived without a scratch, yet a legless skeleton was found at the scene and considered part of a mermaid. The truth is that they had killed Kimie's mother, who used to bind her legs to shorten her height, prompting her leg bones to be heavily damaged in the arson attack. In this context, her daughter decided to take her role as Shimabukuro to keep the legend alive. Once Kimie discovered who the culprits were, she killed them one by one.

Notwithstanding, the shocking reveal is that all the island's senior inhabitants knew that the legend was a fraud and that it was Kimie who had disguised herself as Shimabukuro, yet they decided not to report her to the police because they needed the legend to survive. It is also revealed that they decided not to identify the legless corpse—which they had buried under a nameless grave—because Kimie, who thought nobody knew her family's secret, had taken her mother's role as the immortal woman and lied about her death.

Although the legend was proven to be fake, it shows that folklore is useful to keep isolated, rural villages alive since it helps the local economy and protects natural spaces. Incidentally, the logical reasoning (i.e. finding the truth) harms the island and leaves its inhabitants unprotected.

### *c) Dialogues Between Folklore and the Figurative*

Ancient and contemporary folk tales dialogue in a very unique way in many episodes. The figurative

possibilities of legends are infinite, and this *anime* benefits from it. Thus, the EoK can also be explored at the allegoric level: Ancient folktales rely on supernatural beliefs and unscientific explanations, while contemporary folktales recreated in DC try to explain ancient lore with logical reasoning, which usually implies the use of metaphors. The most paradigmatic case is *Snow Woman's Legend Murder Case* (episode 94).

This episode is a recreation of the *yuki onna* (雪女) legend, translated as the Japanese snow woman. Traditionally, the *yuki onna* is a beautiful woman with long black hair and pale skin who wears a white kimono and floats across the snow like a ghost (Pérez Riobó & Chida, 2012, p. 143). In this episode, her legend is firstly introduced by the narrator of a TV drama the main characters are watching in a shelter, but it is the owner of that shelter who later explains the details of the local myth to them. In fact, along with Ran, she is one of the characters who genuinely believes the legend is true. In this context, the sceptic characters are the two detectives, Conan and Kogoro, who try to convince Ran that she is mistaken: "What you see was a hallucination; you saw a pile of snow and thought it was the *yuki onna*."

The case happens in a shelter in the middle of a snowy mountain. The landscape is a clear reference to the *yuki onna's* habitat, and the background elements (the snow, a white kimono, etc.) are a reminiscence of the legend, too. However, the most important references to the myth are metaphoric, being introduced when an actress named Akiko (who plays the *yuki onna* on the abovementioned TV drama) and her stuntwoman, Yōko, arrive at the shelter. Akiko is seen by Ran wearing a white kimono in the middle of a blizzard, but the girl thinks she is the *yuki onna*. Later, the actress is found dead, along with a suicide note. Nevertheless, Conan discovers that she was murdered by Yōko and exposes the truth.

Akiko portraying the *yuki onna* on a TV drama or wearing a white kimono are not subtle references,

yet this case is paradigmatic because of the use of metaphors, the most relevant allegory being hidden behind the characters' names. For example, Akiko is written with the *kanji* of "bright/light" and "child" (明子), but the pronunciation clearly alludes to the homophone "Akiko" (秋子), meaning "child of the Autumn". Akiko, the victim, has been indeed the prey of the *yuki onna*, for Autumn dies as Winter comes. On the other hand, Yōko's name is written 洋子 (with the *kanji* of "ocean/Western" and "child"), and it is a phonetic reminiscence of *yuki*, since both words share consonants. Given that Yōko is the murderer, the allusion to the *yuki onna*, who is known for killing lost travellers, seems plausible. On a completely speculative level, it could be also suggested that the chosen *kanji* may imply that the West (洋) killed the bright sun (明), that is, the traditional Japan. This is due to the main radical of 明 being "sun" and Japan's toponym meaning "land of the rising sun".

It is true that Akiko plays the *yuki onna* and is found wearing a white kimono, but it was Yōko who put those clothes on her. The whole case seems to point to a parallelism between the mythical woman and the actress, only to later reveal that the real *yōkai* is her co-worker. Thus, at the beginning of the episode, Akiko exclaims, "We, the actresses, cannot get tanned", which may seem to be a reference to the snow woman, as she is always pale; and yet, Yōko is also an actress, so this claim also applies to her. In fact, as the *yuki onna* does, Yōko tries to seduce a man (Kogoro), although she only does it because she wants to create an alibi.

On another note, the trick Yōko used to kill Akiko implied the use of a kaki tree placed next to the shelter, which she climbed to return to her room after murdering her. The kaki is a popular Autumn fruit in Japan, and as it has already been established, Akiko phonetically alludes to Autumn. Since Yōko wanted to kill Akiko to become the main actress, she used the kaki to physically climb and Akiko's murder to socially climb.

Most of the cases with folklore references in DC contain this type of subtle metaphors, but this case is paradigmatic due to the heavy use of allegories at several levels (backgrounds, characters' names, landscapes, dialogues, etc.) in just one episode.

### More than Dialogues: Patterns and Implications

The abovementioned paradigmatic cases have been categorised according to the types of dialogue about EoK that they include. However, an analysis of the episodes as a whole shows relevant data that is worth observing.

#### a) *The Plot -Who Is the Legend's Narrator?*

No coherent data could be obtained from this analysis, given that narrators vary from old people or inhabitants of a certain area to researchers, police officers or even the main characters. The choice of narrators depends on the aim of telling a folktale, that is, if it is to be shown as ancient, then old people or monks warn the visitors (e.g. *The Mist Goblin Legend Murder Case*, episode 52; *Tottori Spider Mansion Demon*, episodes 166-168). If the legend is supposed to be believable, scientists, researchers, or even the police will describe the tale (e.g. *A Ghost Ship Murder Case*, episodes 61-62; *Dracula's Villa Murder Case*, episodes 88-89). Sometimes, the media present the case or there is an urban legend, as happens in *Murder in the Art Museum* (episode 8) or *Love, Ghosts, and World Heritage* (episodes 348-349).

#### b) *Scepticism*

The analysis of the characters' level of scepticism indicates who tend not to believe in the supernatural. Special attention has been given to attributes such as origin, background, age, profession, and genre.

Despite previous studies indicating that DC conveys a subtle allegation against discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin, female characters are often depicted in a biased manner (Quintairos-Soliño, 2020b). In 52 of the 75 analysed cases,

female protagonists are prone to believe in folktales and attribute crimes to supernatural elements, so they are represented as irrational, impressionable characters that believe in the unknown in contrast to male characters, who try to remain undaunted and sceptical. However, it must be considered that these women are not shown to fear folklore in the other 23 cases because (1) they are not present in the episode or (2) folklore is indirectly present as a reference not heavily noticed by them. In this regard, Ran is the most non-sceptical character, being afraid of folklore every time a legend is mentioned, and she even refuses to attend a Halloween party where guests should be dressed as monsters (episode 345). Curiously enough, she is an expert in all types of legends, as well as historical facts.

Furthermore, age is a relevant factor. Children are usually impressionable, yet some of them tend to question the veracity of the myth because they rely on science, like Mitsuhiko. Other kids, like Ayumi, believe in the supernatural; however, sometimes, they try to reject the lore and focus on logic, following Conan's teachings (e.g. *Festival Dolls Dyed in the Setting Sun*, episodes 312-313).

On another note, female teenagers are the most likely to believe in folktales, although their economic status also has a relative influence. Therefore, girls from upper classes, like Sonoko, are shown to enjoy horror stories and parties, while medium class teenagers, like Ran or Hina, are more susceptible to them. Finally, old people tend to preserve folktales and pass them from one generation to the next. Nevertheless, most of them are not frightened by legends and even use them to prevent youngsters from doing something dangerous, despite not really believing in them, as it can be seen in *Tottori Spider Mansion Demon* (episodes 166-168) or *The Old Blue Castle Investigation Case* (episodes 136-137).

Scepticism also varies according to the past of those involved in a case. Characters who were previously implicated in a murder tend to believe deaths related to them are a consequence of their actions

because the spirit is seeking revenge (e.g. *And there were no mermaids*, episodes 222–224). In contrast, less competent detectives usually believe in the supernatural (e.g. Yamamura, Yokomizo) or close the case as a suicide if there is not any plausible explanation to the phenomenon (e.g. *The Mist Goblin Legend Murder Case*, episode 52; *The Black Wings of Icarus*, episodes 03–204).

### c) Origins

It is important to note that characters from the Kansai region, considered one of Japan's most traditional regions (Kaya, 2013), like Kazuha and Heiji, are prone to be protagonists of major cases revolving around folklore. For instance, Kazuha appears in 41 cases, 21 of them being somehow related to folklore, thus lore is present in 51.22% of Kazuha's appearances. Likewise, Heiji deals with folklore in 22 of the 47 cases he appears in, corresponding to 46.81%.

By contrast, except for the protagonists, characters from the Tokyo metropolitan area do not usually deal with the supernatural. The same happens with police officers: those from rural areas such as Gunma or Nagano also encounter more cases related to folklore than the officers based in urban areas, like Tokyo or Chiba. The presence of foreigners is also thought-provoking. Given 75 cases, only *Tottori Spider Mansion Demon* includes a character from overseas with active participation on the events, although non-Japanese characters are a constant in DC (Quintairos-Soliño, 2020b).

Notwithstanding, a character's origin does not necessarily affect their level of scepticism, which we see in Kazuha, who truly believes in folklore, while Heiji does not.

### d) Backgrounds and Settings

The 75 folk cases are set in three different types of settings. 47 of them (62.67%) take place in rural areas, and 15 (20%) are placed in urban areas, while 13 cases (17.33%) are set in other backgrounds,

usually westernised buildings. Japanese folklore is mostly related to the first type of setting, whereas Western influences are mostly found in Western backgrounds. In the bustling streets of Tokyo, however, one can expect urban legends but also haunted mansions, UFO cases, or crimes inspired in horror movies.

This connection between folk references and spaces allows an ecocritical approach; that is, if Japanese folklore creatures and elements are related to pure, rural backgrounds (nature), viewers must wonder why they cannot appear in urban settings. Can they not survive in the city? Consequently, a new question arises. If Japanese folk creatures cannot survive in the city, are modern urban areas also *killing* Japanese folklore? On another note, why are Western folk references usually placed in Western-style buildings? Is DC showing that Japanese and Western folklores should not share the same space and, therefore, the West should be clearly distinguished from Japan? If this is true, then it could suggest that otherness plays a role in the transmission of cultural values and traditions.

It is difficult to provide accurate answers to these questions without interviewing Aoyama or the screenwriters. However, the analysis suggests that DC depicts rural areas as stuck in the past, relying on traditional arts, and desperately fighting against depopulation and unscrupulous urbanism with folk-inspired, sophisticated crimes. That is, rural Japan is fighting against those elements of globalisation that undermine their traditions although their inhabitants know that not all these elements are harmful, as proved in *And there were no mermaids*, where controlled tourism has a beneficial impact on the island. The struggle between the East and the West could have also been suggested in the few cases, such as *Snow Woman's Legend Murder Case* or *The Death God Jinnai Murder Case* (episode 74), where the representation of a Japanese folktale in a European-like environment is used as a narrative mechanism to undermine the credibility of the legend. This would be due to a hypothetical dissonance between the setting and

the origin of the folklore element; nevertheless, further research on this topic is needed to prove this claim.

### Discussion and Conclusions

Although the EoK is a trending theory in the anthropological field, all research on this topic tends to be focused on a theoretical approach and, therefore, empirical studies are far less common. Moreover, *anime* as an object of study had not been examined yet from this perspective, which reveals a new research area that needs to be further developed and strengthened. This is supported by the fact that *anime* is a transcultural medium able to amalgamate various kinds of knowledges, as already stated. Thus, this research stands out as an innovative approach to the EoK and a groundbreaking standpoint when it comes to research on the DC franchise.

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In this regard, DC is a clear example of how Japanese animation articulates the stories represented in its productions, adapting all types of tales to a contemporary context and including detective fiction as a framework where the EoK operates. This *anime* could be considered a part of the “Sociology of emergences” —a sociology fostering the coexistence of all the diverse systems of understanding reality that exist (Sousa, 2014)—being an active contributor to the EoK. This is due to this *anime* globally bombarding Japanese sociocultural features, including Japan’s way of thinking and its particular belief system. Thus, this production becomes a beacon of a counterhegemonic globalisation due to its ability to enhance the knowledge and understanding of the world at a transnational level.

In this *anime*, every analysed case shows supernatural beliefs and scientific deduction as accurate models of rationality. Furthermore, being the main character, Conan is in charge of drawing an abyssal line between both types of knowledge. Therefore, DC highlights the epistemological diversity of the world since it displays the Japanese

universe, and it also emphasises the plurality of knowledges, transcending scientific rationality.

Even so, the scope of this research is limited in the sense that it only involves one main work. However, the results are broad enough if two facts are considered. First, DC is an internationally known franchise with more than 1,000 broadcasted episodes, so the corpus is comprehensive in terms of representation since it includes several types of science-folklore interaction. Second, the object of study is an animated series, which does not only adapt the manga created by Aoyama (1994-) but also original TV episodes produced by a team of different workers, all of them with presupposed different perspectives regarding science or folklore. The corpus and, therefore, the results are expected to be diverse in terms of the creator’s ideological views due to this fact. All in all, to verify the accuracy of our results, applying this article’s methodology to other *anime* that could broaden the current scope is certainly recommended.

In terms of conclusions that can be directly drawn from the analysis, the most relevant implications are described hereunder. They have been organised in order of appearance in the analysis, and from the most general to the most specific.

Interestingly enough, DC’s motto is “shinjitsu wa itsumo hitotsu,” which roughly translates as “there is only one truth”, implying the existence of just one true version of the facts. However, its official translation into English was changed into *one truth prevails*, meaning that there are several truths, but only one stands out. Even if the truth may be only one, the Japanese motto does not reject the EoK, because the paths to arrive at said truth are still diverse.

As seen, applying the logics behind Sousa’s EoK to this animation show a prevalence of three types of dialogues: (1) dialogues between science and the incomprehensible, where folklore—the unknown—is explained through rational thinking; (2) dialogues between folklore and ecology,

where it is shown how folklore activates certain mechanisms to protect nature; and (3) dialogues between folklore and the figurative, where folklore is transformed into metaphors to operate in a contemporary rational sphere.

Likewise, the first type of dialogue can be divided into three categories according to the lore used in the episodes: (1) Japanese folklore (traditional legends, myths), (2) contemporary folklore (urban legends, TV-inspired stories), and (3) Western folklore, that is, stories based on Western folk elements (e.g. vampires, werewolves, Romanesque castles, etc.). By contrast, folklore represented in the second type of dialogue (folklore and ecology) is always Japanese, probably due to this lore being attached to the region, which gives morals about protecting the environment a thoughtful meaning. The third type of dialogue (the figurative) usually focuses on Japanese myths, even though other types of lore can also be found, such as the Grimm's inspirations included in *The Candy House the Witch Lives in* (episode 368).

The selected episodes show a continuous opposite between rational thinking (symbolised by the case resolution) and supernatural/folk beliefs (interpreted through the tricks the culprits use to cover up their crimes). Both aspects are embodied in the characters. Some of them, like Conan, are a clear manifestation of rational thinking since they pursue "the only truth"—a logic that cannot be spoiled by other ways of understanding the world. Among these characters, talented detectives like Heiji Hattori or capable agents such as Shūichi Akai, Rei Furuya, or Miwako Satō stand out.

Nevertheless, the other side of the abyssal line reflects on a mythological reasoning that is grounded on folk beliefs, superstitions, and magic. These characters are usually villagers from rural contexts, who engage in folk traditions in their daily lives and who live away from the city (it must be noted that urban areas are often depicted as a symbol of modernity and, therefore, rational thinking). Thus, rural inhabitants are depicted as

prone to believe that certain events are catalysed by folklore. In this category, young women can also be included: Ran Mōri and Kazuha Toyama display differentiating thinking that opposes the logic displayed by young men. Police officers can show non-rational thinking too, which is the case of the rookie detective, Misao Yamamura, from the rural prefecture of Gunma. Yamamura, whose surname means "mountain village", is a superstitious person that often encounters crimes inspired by folktales; therefore, he usually believes the cause of said crimes is simply a "curse" (e.g. *The Unsmashable Snowman*, episodes 466–467).

Results undoubtedly show the prevalence of scientific thought, yet it could be argued that the inclusion of folklore in DC is an attempt to preserve Japanese folktales via rational narratives. This means it is not necessary to believe that folk creatures are true because folklore can be preserved by not forgetting traditional practices and wisdom as well as by identifying folk references and transmitting them from generation to generation. The importance of protecting certain traditions relies on ecology. It is essential to preserve one's roots as well as one's nature because it is beneficial to everyone and enables one to live in harmony with oneself.

Certainly, DC relies on the pedagogical function of mythology. Although some cases include folklore merely as a reference, most of them offer a discussion about the struggle between logic and superstition and end with a moral about the crime. Thus, this *anime* is transforming its folk narratives into hybrid contemporary folktales that use rational reasoning to adapt themselves to modern contexts.

Another conclusion can be drawn. Regardless of the sceptic characters' opinion, Aoyama (1994-) does not want to ridicule traditional beliefs. Moreover, these beliefs are respected because the author tries to prove that there is a cognoscible truth behind each myth. For instance, in *Love, Ghosts, and World Heritage* (episodes 348–349),

Conan makes fun of Ayumi, who claims to have seen a girl ghost. Conan's friends get mad at him, arguing that he does not need to believe in ghosts, he just needs to believe in Ayumi. If the girl is confident that she has seen the spirit of a child, they must believe her and try to find the truth behind that apparition. Thus, DC is including a moral about the importance of respecting other beliefs because all of them are grounded on the same truth. Indeed, one may wonder to what extent "one knowledge prevails".

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