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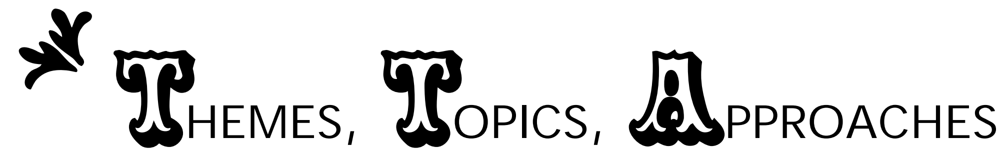

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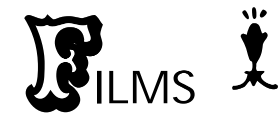

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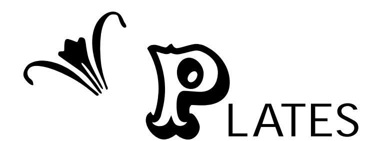

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SPEAKING WITH EYES

TOD BROWNING'S *DRACULA* AND ITS PHANTOM CAMERA

Elisabeth Bronfen

A HUNGARIAN COUNT TRAVELS TO LONDON

In the opening sequence of Tod Browning's *Dracula* a coach drives along a rough mountain pass at dusk. The passengers include peasants from the region, a couple touring Eastern Europe with their daughter, and a solitary young man. While the coach races toward its destination, the young girl reads a passage out loud from her guidebook about enchanted castles from times past. Because the speed at which they are traveling has become uncomfortable, her father asks the coachman to drive more slowly, but immediately one of the peasants interjects. He claims that they must reach the village by sunset, explaining that it is Walpurgis Night, the night of evil, and ominously whispers the word "Nosferatu", only to be silenced by his wife, holding her hand to his mouth. Tod Browning then cuts to a folkloric mainstreet in a Hungarian village, where we see peasants covering their windows with wolfsbane before cautiously closing them. A few inhabitants have collected before the inn, clearly relieved at the arrival of the coach. Once the young solitary traveler, however, explains that his bags are to remain in the carriage because he must continue on to Borgo Pass, they show signs of alarm. Karl Freund's camera oscillates between the astonished gaze of Renfield (Dwight Frye) and the villagers, who are trying to warn him about Dracula and his wives. After the young British man reassures them that their worries are nothing but superstition, the shot cuts to a brief view of the setting sun, before returning once more to Renfield's face. He insists that he isn't afraid, since "it's a matter of business with me", and is about to mount the carriage, when one of the women approaches him holding a cross in her hand, meant to protect him on his nocturnal voyage.

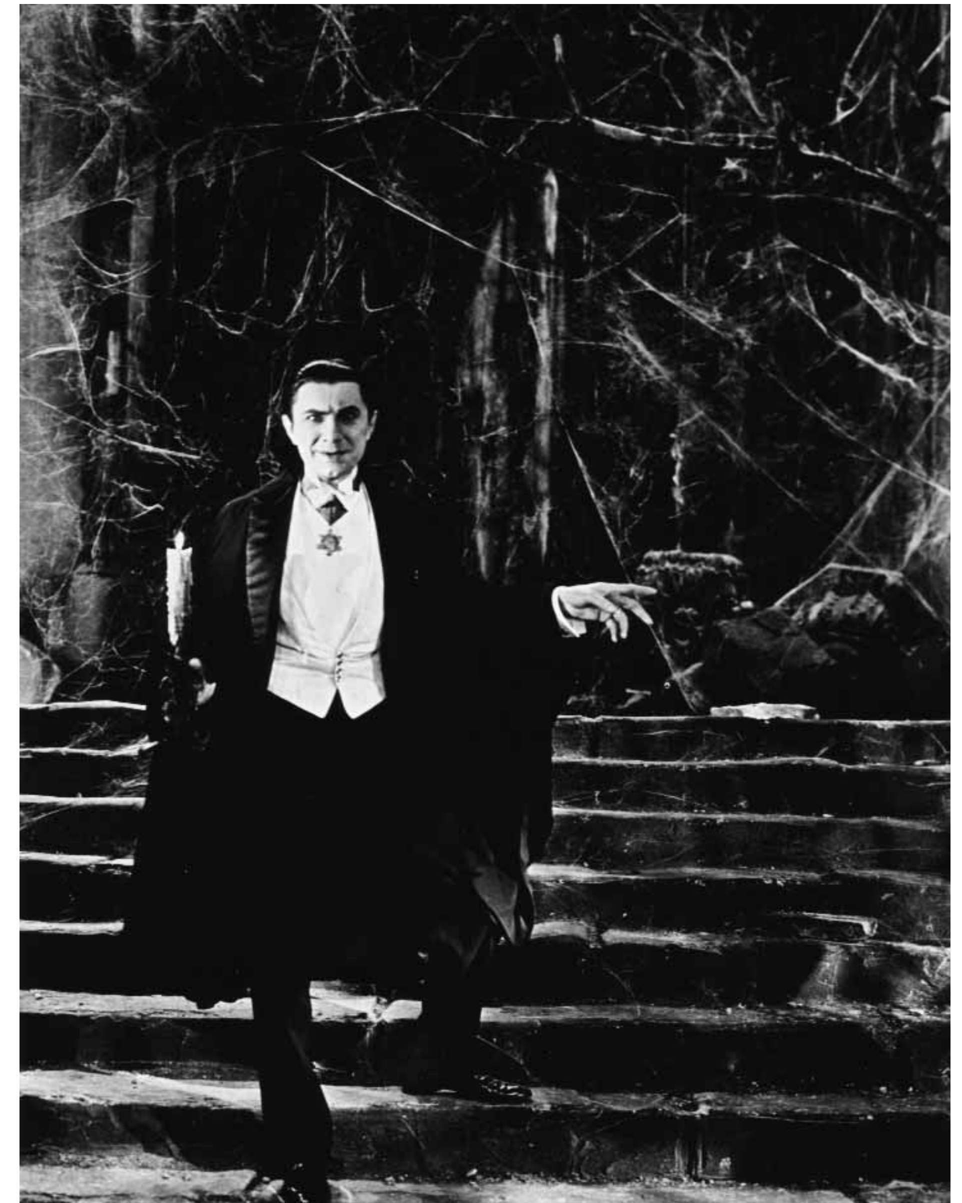
Once more Browning cuts to the mountain pass before superimposing onto this scene, which resembles a landscape painting, the image of one of the enchanted castles the girl had read about. It is as though the guidebook, as well as the superstitions voiced by the villagers, have been transformed into a cinematic spectacle. As the film shifts its location to the dark vault inside the castle, Freund's camera moves toward a coffin, which has begun to open from

Dracula's inhospitable homeland.

within. A hand emerges from the dark slit beneath its lid, then a rat and other vermin. Finally a woman gets up from one of the coffins and is soon seen standing in a circle with two other women around a spider's web. At this point Count Dracula (Bela Lugosi) appears, presumably arisen from a coffin we were not shown, and stares hypnotically into the camera, before slowly mounting the stairs that lead to his chambers above. With the next scene we find him magically transferred to the front of his coach. Enveloped in his dark cape, he asks Renfield, who has duly been dropped off at the crossroads at midnight, to mount before proceeding back to the castle. At this point Browning employs one of the film's very few special effects; for a brief moment we are shown that the coach is now being driven by two bats.

Most critics have praised the opening sequences of *Dracula* for its convincing cinematic dramaturgy, attributing it primarily to Karl Freund, who had already become famous as Fritz Lang's cameraman (*Die Spinnen*, 1919; *Metropolis*, 1927) before going into exile. Indeed, reminiscent of the filmic language of Expressionism, Freund has Renfield, uncertain about what he is to expect, walk backwards into the vast space of the entrance hall, which is heavily lined with shadows, while Count Dracula slowly approaches him from behind with a candelabra in his right hand. Initially capturing the two characters from above, the camera moves to a close-up of Renfield, who turns around at precisely the moment when the Count greets him with what has become one of the signature lines from the film: "I am Dracula." The camera then draws back and we recognise, through a powerful visual metaphor, that Renfield has entered a fatal trap; behind him lies the over-sized shadow of a barred window, in front of him an enormous spider's web. Yet on the face of the clueless visitor we find a mixture of confusion and relief. Renfield still believes himself to be the master of his rational senses, even though he has watched his host simply slip through the spider's web, while he was forced to cut himself a passage with his walking stick. While the camera focuses on the spider at the heart of the web, Dracula comments: "The spider spinning his web for the unwary fly. The blood is the life, Mr Renfield."

The young man has no other choice but to follow his host up the stairs to the upper level of the castle, where he finds a stately room lit with candles, a fire crackling in the fireplace, a table set with food and wine, and a bed prepared for his sleep. The camera repeatedly focuses on Dracula's hypnotic gaze, which along with his idiosyncratic articulation was to become his cinematic trademark. By pointing the spots of two flashlights into the eyes of the actor, Freund was able to produce the impression that these were illuminated from within.


The iconic image of Bela Lugosi as Dracula in the 1931 eponymous film.

After Renfield has presented the Count with all the papers necessary for his move to Carfax Abbey, a fatal seduction sets in, whose homoerotic subtext will structure the rest of the film. Renfield cuts his finger with a paper clip, upon which the film moves to Dracula's lustful gaze. As he approaches the young man, the peasant woman's cross falls in front of the finger on which Renfield has begun to suck. In order for the audience to savour the erotic game between the two characters, the bite, which will transform Renfield into a servant of the vampire, is deferred. Indeed, as Dracula turns away, having poured some of the wine into his guest's glass, the camera begins to drive around Renfield, as though it were spinning a web of its own. At its centre, a silent exchange of gazes takes place, with Dracula's desire reflected in Renfield's boyish smile. Suddenly the door opens and three female vampires enter, while Renfield, drunk with the heavy wine, moves to the balcony and opens a window. Once he has fallen into a stupor, Dracula re-enters what Browning clearly visualises as a stage. For as the three women open the door, we are shown that the space from which they enter is as decrepit as the vault containing the coffins. As the only furnished room this chamber exists exclusively as a stage for the fatal game of seduction, which is suggested but never explicitly shown. Having chased away the three women with a dramatic gesture of his hand, the Count bends over the body of Renfield, lying supine before him, even though the deadly bite itself takes place at the vanishing point of the camera's gaze.

Dracula's face is hidden in the shadows, which Tod Browning uses to highlight the power of his gaze.

A title introduces the next shift of setting, moving us from the enchanted castle to a ship caught in a storm. The Vesta is on her way to England. Renfield, who now calls Dracula his master, has helped him to emerge from his coffin, so that the latter can watch the deadly spectacle taking place on deck. As though he were the director of this disaster we see him standing next to a huge spotlight, while the crew and the captain, tied with ropes to his steering wheel, are shown only as shadows. The dramaturgic foreshortening of this scene is recognised by many critics as an implicit reference to Murnau's *Nosferatu*, 1922. Yet Lyndon Joslin has also discovered that, for financial reasons, the scenes depicting the Vesta's crossing were actually taken from stock material, from a silent film of which we no longer know the title. There can be no interaction between Dracula and the crew, because they actually exist in two separate film worlds.[1] The death of all the men on board, as well as Renfield's entrance to Dr Seward's clinic, bordering on Carfax Abbey, is shown only by way of newspaper headlines, just as Count Dracula's arrival in England is presented indexically, as a short notice in a newspaper describing his first victims. In the subsequent scene we initially see him at dusk, beckoning a flower girl to follow him into the shadow of an alley and feasting on her blood. He then enters The Royal Albert Hall while the police find the girl's corpse. Dracula as a character on the diegetic level of the film thus initially emerges only as an effect of interpretation, which presupposes a reader in the know. For all others the signs of his presence remain mysterious traces.

The dismissal of the Count's female vampires.

While Philip Glass produced a new score for *Dracula* in 1999, the original film had music only in two places—a theme from Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* during the title sequence, and short pieces from Wagner's *Meistersinger* and Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony* during Dracula's appearance in the theatre. In this scene the music was meant to support the theatricality of the Count's manner as he draws the attention of Dr Seward (Herbert Bunston) and his company away from the spectacle onstage onto himself. Indeed, as he enters Dr Seward's box, introducing himself as the new tenant of Carfax Abbey, he inaugurates a second spectacle, which will move well beyond the confines of The Royal Albert Hall. While Mina Seward (Helen Chandler) and Jonathan Harker (David Manners) take the Count to be a curious foreigner, their friend Lucy Weston (Frances Dade) finds herself immediately attracted to him. In the course of this very same night she will fall asleep, leaving her window wide open, allowing Dracula to enter and drink her blood. After her death and transformation into the spectral woman in white, he will turn his attention to the doctor's daughter Mina, while Dr Seward, suspicious about the strange bite marks on all the victims of the mysterious death wave that has suddenly befallen Whitby, calls Professor Abraham Van Helsing (Edward Van Sloan) in for advice.

The plot thus moves towards the battle of wills between two masters, the vampire and his hunter, who resemble each other not only in their foreign

Dracula's seduction of Mina.

accents, but also because of the way their gaze is staged. While Count Dracula's hypnotic power is visually foregrounded by virtue of the artificial lighting of his eyes, Van Helsing wears thick glasses with a transparent rim, which enlarge his eyes and make them appear to protrude from his face. Both recognise each other as enemies almost immediately, even while they also acknowledge each other as worthy combatants, since both believe in the superstition which British positivism, and rational discourse in general, refutes. The implicit cultural pessimism subtending Browning's *Dracula* is thus articulated in the fact that the infection which the vampire introduces to this community in the vicinity of London, can never be fully eradicated. Van Helsing's counter-attack—the ritual killing of the vampire before sunrise—simply represents an inoculation, itself working with the very poison of superstitious belief it seeks to undo. Indeed, Renfield, who surprisingly has unlimited access to the private rooms of the Seward family, repeatedly enters there to warn them of the danger Count Dracula represents for Mina, even while praising his master's omnipotence. He will prove to be right, given that the vampire's erotic charm will ultimately be more powerful than Van Helsing's prohibitions. Like Renfield and Lucy, Mina will also come to subordinate herself to Count Dracula's will, following him to Carfax Abbey on what is to be their wedding night, so that Jonathan Harker and Van Helsing can perform their rite of salvation.

As in the opening sequence, we find ourselves once more in a Gothic hall, which can be reached either by a stone staircase leading upstairs or a door on the ground floor. Because the Count has come to suspect that Renfield has unwittingly led his enemies to his hiding-place, he forces the young man to fall to his death from the staircase as he approaches his master. Dracula then carries the unconscious Mina to the vault; the vampire hunters have already cautiously approached the abbey and watched the fateful encounter between the two men from outside. Precipitated into action by Mina's cry, they break open the door and rush toward the coffins, only to find the Count but not his bride. For reasons unexplained by the dramaturgy of the scene, Mina has hidden herself in the rear part of the vault, watching as Van Helsing pierces the heart of the vampire with a piece of wood. Preserving the ambivalence of the scene, Browning does not allow us to witness the actual killing, only the traces it leaves on the body. Mina cringes in pain, as though it were her heart which was being penetrated, before waking from her trance, walking towards her fiancé and allowing him to embrace her as the first rays of sunlight fall on their ecstatic faces.

Critics have repeatedly faulted Browning for not having adequately used the filmic means available to him, by letting not only the vampire's fatal bites but also his own death occur off screen. Yet these ellipses can also be read as a critical gesture, meant to sustain an ideological ambivalence. After he has approached Count Dracula with his murderous tools, it is, significantly, Van Helsing who will not allow Mina to embrace him, as though he knew of his own contamination; analogous to an earlier scene, in which she forbade Jonathan to kiss her. Furthermore, while he encourages the two lovers to walk up the staircase, which is now flooded by sunlight, Van Helsing himself remains in the darkness of the vault.

As Uli Jung astutely notes, the curiously abrupt manner in which the film ends seems to be the result of a conscious decision. Because the destruction of the vampire is not shown and we can, therefore, not know for sure whether the sighs heard on the soundtrack really are emitted by the dying Count, the suspicion is sustained that Van Helsing might well have become part of the vampiric danger, rather than triumphing over it. Tod Browning's elision need not necessarily signify a lack of interest or talent. Rather, it can be read as a way of avoiding—on the visual level of his argument—the unequivocal triumph over evil, which the return of Mina to her bridegroom represents for the narrative. The alleged solution of the conflict, Jung concludes, leaves such a distinct sense of unease that any simple assuagement of fears is successfully prohibited.[2]

THE FIRST TALKIE HORROR PICTURE

As the first sound film of the horror genre and the most influential of all vampire films, endlessly cited by all subsequent film adaptations of Bram Stoker's novel, Tod Browning's *Dracula* came to inaugurate the beginning of the golden era of monster films, for which Universal Pictures was famous in the 1930s; it paved the way for such films as James Whale's *Frankenstein*, 1931, *Bride of Frankenstein*, 1935 and *The Invisible Man*, 1933, and Karl Freund's *The Mummy*, 1932, among others. After its opening night on 13 February 1931, at the Roxy Theater in New York City, it sold over 50,000 tickets within the first two days, bringing in a profit of $700,000 in the first year. As the most commercially successful film for Universal Pictures during the Depression, it ended up grossing a total of $1,012,189 worldwide within the first five years. Ironically, the production itself had taken place under extremely unfavourable circumstances. Bram Stoker's widow had successfully sued Prana Films, the company that had produced *Nosferatu*, demanding royalties or the destruction of all copies of the film. For this reason Carl Laemmle Jr had decided not to use the novel as a source for the screenplay, but rather the London stage version, written by Hamilton Dean. Rewritten in 1927 by John Balderston for an American production, it had been performed successfully on Broadway and the West coast, with the then unknown Hungarian actor Bela Ferenc Deszo Blasko in the main part, appearing under the stage name of Bela Lugosi. The Pulitzer Prize Winner Louis Bromfield had been engaged by Universal to insert scenes from the novel—such as the coach journey at the beginning—into the Dean/Balderston play script, even though while writing the screenplay he decided to remain as close as possible to the stage melodrama. The trip to the Carpathian Mountains with which Bram Stoker's novel ends was not re-included, while most of the action was limited to the clinic, Dr Seward's home and Carfax Abbey. At the same time, because he chose to reduce the story to Mina's salvation, all the sequences in the novel pertaining to Lucy Westenra—her seduction, her life as a vampire, and finally her highly eroticised killing—were left out of the screenplay.

Even though Browning's *Dracula* has become a cult film, assuming an unquestioned status in our cultural imaginary, film historians like David Skal accuse the director of sabotaging the possibilities of Bromfield's script, given his drastic cuts, his insistence on a static camera, and his decision to leave out special effects wherever possible. Skal takes particular issue with the way that the dialogue scenes that take place in Dr Seward's home only rarely have recourse to montage or shot/reverse shots, so that because these verbal exchanges are primarily filmed as medium shots, occasionally interspersed with close-ups, long stretches of *Dracula* look like filmed theatre. Other film historians have criticised the implausibility of the dialogue, as well as the incoherence of the narrative in general, given that it sometimes introduces plot elements that are not followed up; such as Renfield's biting one of Dr Seward's female servants, when no further mention will be made of this attack. Above all critics have complained that the uncanny events, seminal to all vampire stories, are almost exclusively narrated rather than visualised. According to his detractors, Tod Browning not only doesn't show a single vampire's bite—he also downplays the erotic charm of the vampire by not showing Mina drinking Dracula's blood. Finally, he avoids all cinematic horror by showing no transformation scenes, such as the Count turning into a werewolf or his victims turning into vampires.[3]

By way of explaining the alleged faults of this *Dracula*, film historians speculate that Browning, who had wanted to adapt Bram Stoker's novel for years, had lost interest in the project by the time he was able to do so. They like to cite Helen Chandler, who later claimed that during the shooting the director was usually standing somewhere on the periphery of the set, while she mainly received her instructions from Karl Freund, the cinematographer.[4] This shift in attitude is often attributed to the fact that Browning had not only wanted Lon Chaney, with whom he had successfully made several horror pictures (*The Unholy Three*, 1925; *London after Midnight*, 1927) for the part of the Count, but that the actor, who had turned down the part because of the progressive stage of his throat cancer, died during the shooting. Others, like Bela Lugosi himself, have pointed to the financial pressures imposed upon Browning by Universal Studios, who had categorically opposed any hefty additional production costs.[5] For this reason the director had been forced to shoot the film in sequence, even at that time not a common practice. The frugal use of special effects and the privileging of a static camera over complex travelling shots may well have been the result of these financial constraints. If, however, one considers how consistent *Dracula* is with the rest of Browning's *oeuvre*—particularly his fascination for and sympathy with monstrous and grotesque bodies—a different explanation comes to mind for his choice of privileging the spoken word over visual tricks. As in other films, such as *Freaks*, 1932, Browning's concern was always with the bizarre desires of those on the social and cultural margins. It is enough for him to render their fantasies as scenic fragments, which require neither a coherent, nor a sensational story line. Furthermore, the theatricality of his filmic rendition emphasises both the power of suggestion emanating from Dracula's hypnotic gaze and Van Helsing's will power, as well as the seduction transmitted precisely by foregrounding the voices of the marginal and the monstrous; notably the strangely lulling articulations of Bela Lugosi's vampire, the eloquence of Dwight Frye's Renfield, and finally the riveting transformation of Helen Chandler's Mina from the prim daughter of a doctor into a glamorous female vamp. Indeed, even the choice of

a static camera seems logical, once one sees in it as attempt to savour the newly discovered possibilities of sound as a medium of seductive film horror.

Of course the notoriety of Browning's *Dracula* within film history resides above all else in the uncanny identification between Bela Lugosi and his role. The Hungarian expatriate, who had already played the alluring Count on Broadway, did everything to get this part and was even willing to have his wages reduced to $500 a week. He was to become famous over night, even though this celebrity would also prove to be a doom of sorts. The hypnotic effect of his acting was so convincing that the boundary between film illusion and reality became fluid. Universal Pictures used his Hungarian origins as advertisement for the film, so that for his audience Bela Lugosi became identical with the aristocratic Eastern European vampire. He had only one accent—the voice of Dracula—and the roles he was offered after his work with Tod Browning were almost all in horror pictures. Like Renfield, trapped in the Count's web, the actor found himself caught in the film persona he had always craved. In interviews he later confessed that he could have been angry with this vampire, but it had allowed him to make a living, even if it meant a form of dying at the same time. The strange vampirism by which the actor paid in blood for the celebrity he won found its acme during his burial at the Holy Cross Cemetery in 1956. As he had wanted it, Bela Lugosi was buried in the suit, cape and medal he had worn in his star role. Rumour has it that just before his death, so as to secure his artistic legacy, he gave Dracula's ring to Christopher Lee, who was in the process of re-interpreting the role under the direction of Roger Corman.[6]

Bela Lugosi never managed to escape his association with Dracula.

DRACULA – A MULTIFACETED TROPE

Any reading of *Dracula* must bear in mind that the world in which Tod Browning's vampire came to be born was a culturally precarious one. After the stock market crash in 1929, a cultural nostalgia for the vertiginous optimism of the Roaring Twenties was coupled with a desire to repress the stagnating economic situation. For this reason, the mass-market demanded more and more escapist fantasies. So as to draw the attention of the audience to the affective power of fantasy worlds, Van Helsing appeared on screen at the end of the original version of the film, in a sequence that was later cut. Standing against the proscenium of a motion picture theatre, and looking directly into the camera, he delivers the epilogue of the stage play:

> Just a moment, ladies and gentlemen! Just a word before you go. We hope the memories of Dracula and Renfield won't give you bad dreams, so just a word of reassurance. When you get home tonight and the lights have been turned out and you are afraid to look behind the curtains and you dread to see a face appear at the window—why, just pull yourself together and remember that after all *there are such things*.

Given that this cinematic rendition of *Dracula* declares itself to be a vampire, not only haunting its audience after the lights have gone on again in the theatre, but, owing to its performative power, also insisting on the reality of its revenants, David J Skal has succinctly called it "a lightning rod for prevailing social anxieties".[7]

Indeed, Browning's film is easily read as escapist cinema, because it seems to deflect the audience's gaze from the concrete social struggle of the 1930s (notably the economic bloodletting of the American public as a result of a breakdown of the economy), shifting its attention toward a different stage—namely one where a quasi-mythical battle against evil was being fought. At the same time, Bela Lugosi's elegant and courtly Eastern European Count also functions as a cipher for a cultural struggle. As the representative of a long lost world, he welds together in his monstrous body Bram Stoker's late Victorian culture with the post-First World War America of Tod Browning. Ronald R Thomas thus reads the displaced aristocrat—who on the diegetic level of the film emigrates to England to find fresh blood, while on the level of the film's production he moves to Hollywood to reinvigorate his life as an actor—as an embodiment of "the modern belief that the forces of the past drain the life from the present even as they sustain it".[8] Given that this embodiment of a past devouring the present was also connected to notions of an old European belief in superstition, rebelling against a Western European rationality and positivism, one might well read the battle between the two masters Count Dracula and Van Helsing along the lines Friedrich Nietzsche proposes in his discussion of the emergence of morality as the result of a battle between interpretations. Dracula thus functions not only as a cipher for the economic bloodletting of modern man, but also for an anti-enlightened attack on the West. As Thomas explains, it appeals most to those young Westerners whose desire for transgression poses a weak link in the cultural system of modernity. Only because they are either literally or figuratively willing to transgress the boundaries of the safe grounds of the West—Renfield as a tourist in Hungary, Lucy and Mina in the fantasies that lead them away from bourgeois notions of marriage—Dracula is able to subject them to his will to power. It is this ambivalence among young Victorians that is rendered visible, both in the novel and in the film, by virtue of the fact that the vampire can only come to those who open their window to him.

The shortening of Lucy's family name from Stoker's Westenra to Weston in the Dean/Balderston play text is read by Uli Jung as an indication of the fact that she, in turn, embodies the cultural crisis endemic to Anglo-American modernism. In the film's narrative a threat from outside, pitting Eastern aristocracy against Western bourgeoisie, invokes the longing for a leader typical of the 1930s, resulting in a battle against evil ultimately fought under the auspices of a loss of rationality. Thus, in Dracula, the struggle for supremacy with which modern Europe comes to reassert itself against the onslaught of an anti-enlightened interpretation of the world contains a seminal *aporia*. Evil can only be fought with the weapons of this very same evil. Dr Seward and his friends only have a false choice. They can either fall prey to Count Dracula or blindly follow Van Helsing, even while both gestures entail a subjugation of sorts. At stake is, then, not only the fact that neither Dr Seward's science nor Van Helsing's anti-enlightened superstition is able to triumph over the power of the vampire. What also becomes visible is the manner in which the Count and the vampire hunter ultimately resemble each other in their authoritarian fantasies of omnipotence, as well as in the violence they have recourse to so as to assert their will to power. Uli Jung concludes that the chase and destruction of the monstrous body should not be read as a gesture of civilisation but rather as an atavistic gesture of suppression, with which the dominant ideological discourse seeks to assure its *status quo*.[9]

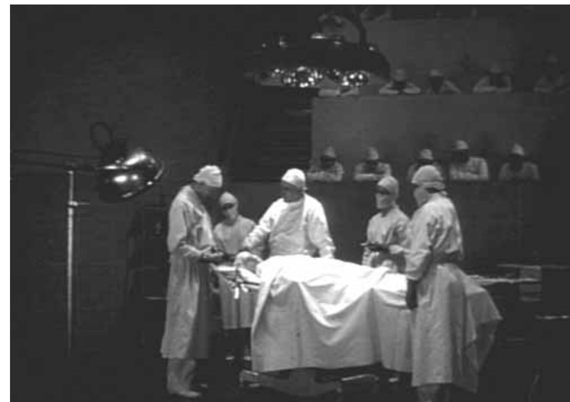
The public success of Tod Browning's *Dracula* can, indeed, be compared to a cultural lightning rod for the diverse economic and cultural anxieties of the 1930s. One must, however, not overlook the fact that the ideological values of the West triumph over the vampire in the end because they are defended by a small band of men who believe unconditionally in both the means and the ends of this cultural struggle. Given that his sympathies were always with those whom a given dominant culture declares to be monsters, Tod Browning himself, however, decisively warns against such unquestioned subjugation. If some critics are right to accuse David Manners of never having fully stepped into the role of Mina's fiancée, this may well have been intentional on the part of the director. In Browning's version, Jonathan Harker, who would indeed more readily fit into a Lubitsch comedy, initially refuses to be part of the mass hysteria revolving around the hunting and killing of a vampire. At the beginning of the night of the showdown between the vampire and his adversaries, he actually disobeys Van Helsing's orders and tries to convince Mina to leave her father's home and drive with him to London. The fact that he fails in disassociating himself and his bride from the madness Van Helsing orchestrates, could thus be read as a further indication for how difficult it is to escape from any anti-enlightened gesture once it has actually taken hold of the modern Western mind.

If we are willing to read the vampire as a cipher for repressed, forbidden or past knowledge, which can never fully be eradicated but only transferred to the periphery of cultural consciousness, then Horkheimer and Adorno's notion of a dialectic of enlightenment can help focus the relationship between modernity and its mythical Other that emerges in Browning's *Dracula*. The West produces the vampire as its toxic counterpart, deploying the destruction of this monstrous freak body, so as to reestablish a claim to power, which had fallen into crisis. At stake isn't simply the fact that the infection can never fully be cured, but also that culture's monstrous Other be understood as the embodiment of a rotten kernel at the heart of the West. This dialectic becomes most poignant in the attack on the figure, who not only contains the West in her name but also represents its most marginal member. For in Tod Browning's Lucy Weston we find embodied the financially independent young woman, attracted to a world of morbidity, who, in contrast to the heroine of Stoker's novel with her three suitors, has no fiancé and instead determines her own sexual desire. After all, once she has spoken to Count Dracula in Dr Seward's box at The Royal Albert Hall, she begins to dream about a life as Countess in Transylvania. The same night she will open her window before going to bed. In a sequence of shot/reverse shots Browning shows us Dracula standing on the sidewalk below, and Lucy looking out of her window into the dark night, before going to bed with a book. She doesn't read for long, because the Count has already approached her window in the shape of a bat. In a close up we see that just before falling asleep she looks up from her reading, so that Dracula, who appears only a few seconds later next to her bed, is thus staged by Browning as the materialisation of her reading. If opening the window was an indication of her unconscious desire, this now assumes a concrete object in the shape of the Count, who after hovering over her body, begins to feast on it. As though she had called him in fantasy, his bite fulfills her fascination with the life of the Transylvanian aristocracy of past times.

Lucy Weston, already under Dracula's spell.

Once again, Browning does not show the actual consummation of the Count's lust. After the shadow of his body has merged with her dreaming face he cuts away from Bela Lugosi's lips just as they are about to touch the neck of Frances Dade and moves instead to the anatomical theatre in Dr Seward's clinic. In a long shot we now see Lucy's corpse, lying on a dissecting table. While Dr Seward explains to the other doctors, as well as the medical students sitting in the auditorium, that the transfusions had not helped save the patient, who had died of an inexplicable loss of blood, he leans over her lifeless body and in so doing assumes the very same position Dracula had in the previous scene. Lucy

has not only become the object of a collective gaze; she has also been transformed into a text, which the doctor must interpret on this public stage for a select audience. If, in a previous scene, we saw her as a spectator at The Royal Albert Hall, as a corpse she is now herself the centre of the performance. If, furthermore, while sitting in the theatre box she had recited a poem about how the dead haunt the living, she is now herself a revenant. Finally, if before going to sleep she had taken a book with her to bed, the feminine reader has now been turned into a sign, indeed into a text dictated by Dracula himself. As the gazes of the doctor and his students displace that of the Count, the perspective of the latter comes to be replaced by that of modern science. This transformation, however, significantly occurs over the body of a beautiful dead woman, which has now become a contested object between the representatives of enlightened science and those of superstition. Sitting in Dr Seward's office in a subsequent scene, Van Helsing offers an interpretation of both Lucy's corpse based on an ancient tomb about vampires, from which his helper is reading aloud. The transformation of Lucy Weston into a vampire thus entails a series of readings, beginning with Lucy herself, reading aloud at the theatre. Van Helsing immediately recognises her sign of transformation—the wound on her throat—as the signature of a vampire. Through the glasses of his anti-enlightened knowledge he is able to produce a reading of his own, meant to convince Dr Seward that, in the manner proposed by Horkheimer and Adorno, enlightened science can revert back to superstition. While Dr Seward continues to hold onto his belief that modern science does not acknowledge the existence of vampires, Van Helsing replies that yesterday's superstition can seamlessly turn into the scientific reality of today. It is his words, one might surmise, which produce the vampire as a thinkable object that Count Dracula can then give a body to in the follow sequences. In so doing, the vampire also materialises a dream for Van Helsing; namely the superiority of his mythically inflected interpretation of the word.



Reading Dracula's text, Lucy's corpse.

It is those that are positioned on the cultural and social margins, then, that are fascinated by the vampire: Renfield traveling through strange lands, Lucy dreaming of a past elegance, Van Helsing opposed to modern science. Only because they are willing to engage with him—as a representative of all that has no place in bourgeois modernity—can Count Dracula assume power in London. Indeed, precisely in the scene revolving around the infection of the psychiatrist's daughter Mina, Browning renders explicitly visible that we are to conceive of this vampire first and foremost as a phantom, giving body to the dreams and desires of the marginal members of this community. Mina's sudden illness is explicitly staged as an attack of hysteria, given that in the late nineteenth century this psychosomatic illness was predominantly conceived as a splitting of consciousness, with the nocturnal self radically contradicting the diurnal one. In Mina's case we find this double consciousness, as Sigmund Freud called it, performed by virtue of the fact that at times she displays an erotically encoded euphoria, while in her so-called normal condition all recollection of this other state is gone. Bram Stoker, familiar with French psychiatrist Jean Martin Charcot's writings on hysteria, was not the only novelist who had recourse to such reference. Given his interest in the murky interface between reality and dream as well as all indirect articulations of forbidden or hidden desires, he was, furthermore, also fascinated with the method of hypnosis developed by Charcot and Freud. Particularly useful for the dramaturgy of the vampire story was, of course, the fact that hysterics were famous for speaking with their bodies what they could not articulate in the symbolic language of everyday speech. The suggestibility of Count Dracula's victims, allowing them to fall into a trance almost immediately upon his gaze falling on them, their oscillating between excitation and exhaustion, as well as their dramatic performance of the strange stories about being attacked by magical creatures, are all gestures readily found in the psychiatric literature of the time. Indeed, the medical discoverers of the unconscious share with the authors of vampire stories the wish to explore those aspects of the psychic apparatus that cannot be thought by modern positivism. With the reversion back to superstition one finds in all vampire narratives, what also returns are all those aspects of the psyche that have no place in the world of utilitarian economic progress—anxiety, desire, ecstasy, and self-expenditure.

THE VAMPIRIC SCREEN

What, however, does it mean to make the claim that Count Dracula gives body to the dreams of those on the cultural margins? With the attack on Renfield, a rhetoric of hysteria sets in, which will repeat itself with all the other characters. Hypnotised by the gaze of the vampire, each one of the afflicted characters will open his or her window and immediately lose consciousness. The appearance of the vampire is thus made possible by virtue of the fact that these young Westerners listen to a 'different' voice; which for the language of cinema is significantly that of the gaze. It is to this speaking gaze that they submit themselves to—in all cases, however, with closed eyes. Appearing before Renfield, Lucy or Mina, Dracula is perceived by them only as a dream figure; which is to say as a figure with whom they communicate while they are in an unconscious state. At the same time the victims of the vampire are also a cipher for the film audience, which allows itself to be transposed into the position of dreaming, while sitting with open eyes in a dark film theatre. Tod Browning places this analogy at the

Dracula communes with his victims whilst they are in a receptive, unconscious state.

centre of his staging of the first attack on Mina. Initially we see her sleeping body, then in the reverse shot Dracula, who has suddenly emerged at her bedside. He is about to lean over her, but in contrast to the parallel scene with Lucy we do not see both together in one frame. Instead, Bela Lugosi leans forward towards the camera, until we arrive at a close-up of his face, distorted by lust, completely taking over the film screen. Seamlessly, the audience has been translated into the position of Mina, so that the vampire's threatening face is actually approaching the audience as well. The visual logic of this shot sequence suggests that Mina's dream is also ours; the bite she will receive, once the image has become dark, is also meant for us.

Mina covering her wound, the representation of a desire that she cannot express.

In the following scene Tod Browning cuts to the library in Dr Seward's home. Mina is trying to recount for her fiancé the nocturnal event we have just witnessed—the pale face with piercing red eyes approaching her through a foggy night. She is unable to describe the bite we were not shown, and brings her narration to a sudden halt. Jonathan, trying to calm her, insists that everything was only a dream, which she should try to forget. Van Helsing, however, sits down next to her. Once more at stake is the question of reading,

because Mina, placed directly in front of a bookcase, is as much an object of interpretation for him as Lucy was. While Mina's father and fiancé look on, he discovers the familiar marks on her throat. Like Lucy she is also staged as the object of the gaze of men, who are in the process of deliberating her condition. In response to Jonathan's query how these wounds came about, a maid announces Count Dracula. This comic ploy might well also be taken as a dramatic performance of the fact that the vampire appears in response to a request. To the three men, he embodies their need to find someone to hold responsible for the fact that Mina is hiding something from them. As in many classic case histories of hysteria, the wound on her throat can be seen as a psychosomatic articulation of a desire, for which she can find no symbolic language, because she is not allowed to speak about it directly. Furthermore, like the patients Freud writes about, she becomes more animated once the Count has entered the sitting room, as though her body were giving voice to something her conscious mind forbids her to admit to herself. At the same time, as was the case with Lucy, her body also emerges as a text written by him. Dracula openly admits that the nightmares she has been having could well be the result of stories he has been telling her. In so doing he is, of course, equating the transfusion of blood, which Browning never shows us, with an exchange of fantasies.

Mina speaks to Dracula, but he has no reflection in the mirror.

In contrast to the static camera with which most of this dialogue scene is visually presented, Browning at this point includes one of the very few montage sequences of the entire film. While Mina, still sitting on the couch, continues talking to the Count, Jonathan and Van Helsing unintentionally point the mirror of a cigarette case in her direction, only to discover that the Count cannot be seen in the reflection. It is, of course, a commonplace of folklore that vampires have no mirror image; that as dead bodies returned to the living, they contain no corporeal substance. What this staging highlights, however, is Count Dracula's status as a phantom. While the three male onlookers intently follow the conversation between Mina and her guest, Browning offers a montage of what they see in the mirror as opposed to what they see in reality—a framed image of Mina speaking with herself. This image within the film image visualises that Dracula is not just to be understood as a concrete threat, but also as a monstrous body, emanating from Mina's imagination; a figure of fantasy she projects outside herself, so as to discover in conversation with him something she would otherwise have no access to.

The danger of Browning's vampire thus consists precisely in the fact that it isn't corporeal but spectral; a figure without concrete substance, present and absent at the same time. Given the fact that in this sequence of images the character, whose name the film bears in its title, can be made to appear and disappear by virtue of the trick of montage, what is suggested is that the spectral presence of the vampire may well also be read as a self-conscious reference to the phantomatic aspect of the film medium itself; the cinematic image, too, is nothing more than a projection from an internal light outside—present or absent, depending on the flicking of a switch.

After the father has sent away his daughter, a battle of wills ensues between the Count and his contestants. Van Helsing shows him the mirror and, with one of the melodramatic gestures Lugosi was to become famous for, Dracula throws it to the ground, regaining his composure before leaving the room. Van Helsing, who now believes he has enough evidence to disclose the true identity of the mysterious tenant of Carfax Abbey, finds the other men still doubting his superstitious code of interpretation. His insistence that the power of the vampire lies precisely in the fact that people will not believe in him once more gives voice to the performative aspect of the vampire—which is to say that Dracula gains reality by virtue of a belief *in* him and the attribution of the signifier vampire *to* him. At the same time the equation between the vampire and an act of faith, cinematically performed in the mirror scene, also discloses how much cinema in general owes to superstition. After all, the film screen also draws its affective power from the fact that it allows characters mysteriously to appear whose existence we do not rationally believe in. Apodictically put, precisely because we don't believe in these phantoms, cinema works. In Browning's staging Mina thus emerges as the point of negotiation for his own artistic medium. While the men argue with Van Helsing over the existence of vampires, she quietly leaves her father's house, only to walk straight into the arms of the Count, who envelopes her in his dark veil. At stake for her is neither a rational rejection *of*, nor a fantastic belief *in* his existence. Instead she is drawn by a force of attraction which cannot be explained, which pulls her along only to leave her exhausted once its power wears off.

A few minutes later, Jonathan will carry an unconscious Mina across the dark lawn back into the house. But the nebulous influence Count Dracula asserts over her—as a cipher for the demonic aspect of cinema itself—not only brings about exhaustion. It also calls for a rejuvenation, which allows those willing to submit themselves to this power to test emotions and roles they couldn't have devised on their own. At the *peripeteia* of the film's narrative, Mina appears in a tight silk dress on the veranda of her father's house. Jonathan calls her a "changed girl" and she herself admits to feeling strangely inebriated. In the seduction scene that ensues we recognise in Helen Chandler's gaze and gestures the transformation of the inhibited bourgeois daughter into a self-conscious glamour star.

To her fiancé she praises the night, while beckoning him with her eyes to come sit next to her on the bench and allow her to bite his neck. Long before Van Helsing puts an end to this unholy spell we recognise the demonic aspect of

Bela Lugosi in full flow as Dracula.

her charm, even while its attraction is fundamentally ambivalent. As she leans toward Jonathan, Browning cuts to a close-up of her face so that we see her enticing gaze coming ever closer to him, but also to us. What fills up the screen by virtue of this approach is, of course, the glamour star; the objectified body around which Hollywood's narrative code revolves. At the same time Mina now also assumes the position the vampire had in the scene of Lucy's seduction, although she immediately falls out of this new role once she sees the cross Van Helsing is holding in his hand, only to confess to Jonathan the blood she has exchanged with Dracula. What ultimately interrupts the scene is the sound of a shotgun—one of the servants had tried to shoot a bat hovering above the veranda; whereupon Van Helsing assures Jonathan that this is entirely impossible. In the reverse shot we see the servant, who is the only one not susceptible to the suggestive power of the vampire. "They are all mad", he explains to the serving girl standing next to him, and indeed inside the house everyone has been afflicted by the mass hysteria called forth by the Count's presence. Either they succumb to his gaze, like the maid in front of Mina's door, who allows him once more to enter her mistress' bedroom, or they run through the dark night toward Carfax Abbey, so that the final showdown between the vampire and his hunters can take place there. Once the infectious fantasy has set in, one might surmise, there can be no outside to the haunting.

Perhaps because all subsequent adaptations of this novel inevitably involve a complex return of things past, Browning's *Dracula* has become one of the most resilient ciphers for the cinematic fantastic. If the publication of Bram Stoker's novel fell into the same period in which cinema was born, its stage version brought with it a rejuvenation of the *Dracula* story that ultimately came to precipitate a long series of cinematic revenants. Because of these films, popular culture has become one of the privileged sites for defining our relation to late Victorianism as a vampiristic exchange; with each remake, the lost world depicted in Stoker's novel returns to haunt us. At the same time, cinema itself emerges as the site of a dialectic exchange with the dead. Owing to its play with light and shadow, phantoms can take shape and the dead can return to the living. Furthermore, the cinematic medium also bears the sign of the vampire insofar as it belatedly invokes, and this reinvigorates on screen, a world of film production which no longer exists—in the case of Tod Browning's *Dracula* the actors and sets of the early 1930s. The hypnotic gaze of Bela Lugosi has become coterminous with this self-reflexive moment, as it so explicitly refers not only to the visual as the sense privileged above all others by the cinematic apparatus, but also to its technical correlatives—the camera's lens, focusing the actor's performance, as well as the eye of the viewers, enchanted by what they find unfolding before them in the dark with the help of white light on a white screen. And it is precisely about the seductive power of cinema itself that Count Dracula speaks with these eyes, in all his cinematic embodiments since Tod Browning's first horror talkie.

NOTES

1. Joslin, Lyndon, *Count Dracula Goes to the Movies. Stoker's Novel Adapted*, 1922–1995, Jefferson and London: McFarland and Company, 1999, p. 27.

2. Jung, Uli, *Dracula. Filmanalytische Studien zur Funktionalisierung eines Motivs der viktorianischen Populärliteratur*, Trier: Universitäts Verlag, 1997, p. 111.

3. See David J Skal, *Hollywood Gothic. The Tangled Web of Dracula from Novel to Stage to Screen*, London and New York: Norton, 1990; and also Alain Silver and James Ursini, *The Vampire Film. From Nosferatu to Interview with the Vampire*, New York: Limelight Editions, 1997.

4. Skal, *Hollywood Gothic*, p. 130.

5. See Mark A Vieira, *Hollywood Horror from Gothic to Cosmic*, New York: Harry N Abrams, 2003.

6. Edwards, Larry, *Bela Lugosi. Master of the Macabre*, Bradenton: McGuinn and McGuire, 1995.

7. Skal, *Hollywood Gothic*, pp. 139 and 142.

8. Thomas, Ronald R, "*Dracula: Novel and Cinema*", *Nineteenth-Century Contexts. An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Special Issue: "Postmodern Victorians", vol. 22, no. 1, 2000, p. 78.

9. Jung, *Dracula*, p. 109. See also Elisabeth Bronfen, *The Knotted Subject. Hysteria and its Discontents*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.