National College of Art and Design

Fine Art Painting

Sex and the Single Bloodsucker

by

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Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design and Complementary Studies in Candidacy for the Degree of Fine Art Painting 1994

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my brother Conor for helping me find research material, and Mr G. Walker for his advice.

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INTRODUCTION

The vampire myth crossed over from literature into film in 1922 (*Nosferatu*). Since then there has been a steady stream of vampire films, enough to fill up a "sub-genre" position within horror films. The history of this sub-genre is marked by lengthy cycles of production which usually ended up with film parodies, and looking "like a last desperate milking of overworked themes" (Pirie, 1977, p.9). Universal introduced the first vampire cycle in the 1930s. Beginning with a theatrical Dracula (*Dracula*, 1931), the character went through a few permutations before ending up performing cameo roles (*Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*, 1948). Then, in the 1950s, this apparently tired cultural icon was revitalised by Hammer Studios, and another successful cycle of films begin (*Dracula*, 1958; *The Brides of Dracula*, 1960). The seventies saw the rise of the female vampire (*Daughters of Darkness*, 1970) and, although "the sense of an epidemic has utterly vanished" (Pirie, 1977, p.9), the myth has had enough appeal to have been reworked in the eighties (*The Lost Boys*, 1986; *Near Dark*, 1988) and to spawn an epic and numerous smaller ventures in the nineties (*Bram Stoker's Dracula*, 1993; *Tale of the Vampire*, 1993).

In this thesis, I want to argue that the vampire film is characterised by the theme of sexuality. In chapter one, I want to argue that the myth is a form of displaced anxiety. The basic idea of the vampire is sin, "otherness" and "dependency". Although this formula has been adapted to numerous interpretations, it has been most consistently used to give expression to fears about different and threatening types of sexuality. By looking at the symbols employed in individual films, it

is possible to work out what fears underline that particular interpretation of the myth.

In chapter two, I want to apply this analytical method to a range of vampire films from 1922-1976. Further, I will argue that the sexual concerns a particular film deals with are linked to social issues relevant to the era in which it was produced.

In chapter three, I want to bring this discussion up to date by examining two recent films, *Near Dark* (1988) and *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1993). By examining the anxieties at the root of these films, I want to see if they are representative of fears about sexuality in contemporary society.

CHAPTER ONE

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The vampire myth has occupied a prominent place in different cultures for centuries. The vampire, albeit in varying shapes and forms, appears in "almost every recorded culture" (Silver and Ursini, 1975, p.18). Ancient Greece had one called a "Lamia", a female who was both a succubi - a demon who has sexual relation with unsuspecting men - and drank human blood. "In ancient Assyria and Babylon "Ekimmu" were the souls of the dead who had broken one or more of the numerous taboos, and consequently were forced to wander the earth tormenting the living and drawing life from them" (Silver and Ursini, 1975, p.18). In western literature, the popularity of the vampire figure started around the early eighteenth century, with the publication of *The Vampyre* in 1819. It was written by Dr John Polidori and was based on the character of Lord Byron. This was followed by numerous productions: in the forties, by the "penny dreadful" comic *Varmey The Vampire*; in the seventies, *Carmilla* by Sheridan le Fanu; and at the end of the century, *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, which has become the classic literary influence for the vampire film. In the cinema, the vampire first appeared in F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* in 1922. Since then, over six hundred films have been produced, giving the vampire film a sub-genre position within the horror genre.

However, despite its popularity, the vampire film has suffered from a lack of critical attention. Christine Gledhill suggests that this situation is particular to the horror genre as a whole. "The genre offers 'a never never land' governed by absolutely inflexible laws" (Gledhill, 1985, p.99). Unlike the "western" or the gangster movie, the

vampire film is not based on actual historical events. It is, therefore, cut off from "a major source of legitimation" (Gledhill, 1985, p.99). The supernatural abilities of the vampire, and its association with an adolescent audience, have served to ear-mark the vampire film as a cultural product full of indulgent and inconsistent fantasies. However, in this thesis, I want to argue that the content and meaning of the vampire film can be located in society, and that these correspond to social and political realities and issues, that in appearing abstract, ahistorical and in no way realistic, this phantasmagorical form lends itself to limitations of very general social concerns and anxieties and, further, that vampirism tends to be about sexual anxiety of some description, and by looking at individual films, this can be seen to correspond to social issues at the time the films were made.

To start with, I would argue that the vampire is a form of displaced anxiety. The idea behind this is simple. If a person is anxious about something, but is bound by conventions and cannot express this anxiety directly, they can use metaphorical language to refer to the problem without revealing the specifics of it. In this way, it is possible to read the vampire as a figure conjured up to give expression to some kind of displaced fears. This displaced fear will belong to the person employing the metaphor, but he or she will be safely distanced from it by the fantastical and coded language of the vampire story.

The vampire, because he has broken some law or taboo, or by practising some form of aberrant behaviour, is outcast from society. In appearance and character he is seen as other than and different from the social norm. "The mouth, so far as I could see it under the heavy moustache, was fixed and rather cruel looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth; these protruded over the lips whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality in a man of his years" (Stoker, *Dracula*).

Further to this, he is dependent on human blood for survival and as such, poses a threat to the community he lives in, i.e., as a parasite. Thus, the basic plot of all vampire films revolves around the vampire's need for blood and the human character's struggle to destroy him. All of this happens within the realms of fantasy. The vampire is attributed supernatural abilities. He can change shape, has superhuman strength, and can live for hundreds of years.

In short, then, the vampire is a figure who has sinned against society, is ostracised, yet remains dependent on contact with that society. I would argue that this is a metaphor which symbolises anxiety about "otherness" and "dependency". The vampire film is therefore an expression of fear about something that is foreign and unknown. "The vampire idea deals in the terror of recognising, challenging, or being challenged by dependency and always registers this through the body" (Dyer, 1993, p.10). Richard Dyer suggests that the vampire myth is open to innumerable reworkings:

> Like all long-lived popular cultural ideas, innumerable variations can be played on this basic concept, its vivid iconography and compelling narrative patterns ... Marxists liked to compare capitalists to vampires, feeding off the labour of the working class. In *Ganja and Hess* (1971), Bill Gunn used the vampire idea to explore the dependencies of race and colonialism ... or how about the vampire as the old world, old Europe, Eastern Europe, leeching off modern, industrialising, Western Europe (and North America)?

However, he also argues that the vampire myth has been most consistently used to look at the repulsiveness and attractions of sexual difference. This is apparent from the "vivid iconography" and "narrative patterns" used in vampire films. The general iconography surrounding the vampire figure can be seen to have a sexual emphasis. For example, in *The Children of the Night* the animals associated with the vampire are those

abhorred by western culture. In condensed Freudian terms, the wolf is a symbol for uncontrolled bestial libido, the snake suggests seduction and danger, the rat conjures up images of disease and infestation, the bat feeds at night off unsuspecting victims. Thus, the vampire is equated with promiscuity and infection. Similarly, the appearance and dress of the vampire is linked to sexual deviance. One of the stock icons of the genre has been the aristocratic vampire. The connection between aristocracy and unorthodox sexuality is made apparent in Polidori's *The Vampyre*. It was based on Byron, whose sexual experimentations inform both his work and the myth that has grown up around him. As a result, Dracula's cloak is representative of hidden and unusual desire.

The narrative patterns and devices also serve to emphasise sexual difference. One of the most common devices is the journey. In *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1993), Jonathan Harker travels from London to the Transylvanian Alps. This involves a move from the structured and civilised society of London to a more backward, superstitious and distant region. As such, he has left behind a normal heterosexual relationship and arrived in a place where rules about sexuality are different, more threatening and bizarre. The behaviour of the female vampires who come to Jonathan during the night and drain him of blood symbolises unrestrained sexual indulgence that appears especially threatening when compared to the prudish moralism espoused by Mina back in London.

CONCLUSION

In short, then, the basic idea of the vampire myth is about "otherness" and the fear that comes from being dependent on and connected to this. Further to this, there is a constancy with which vampire films tend to be about some kind of sexual anxiety. The exact

nature of this anxiety is hidden because it is fantastical, and the vampire such an unreal figure. However, it is possible to decode the metaphorical language of the vampire film. By examining iconography, narrative patterns and characterisations, one can suggest what they symbolise in cultural and social terms, and as such, highlight the fears and anxieties which lie at the root of individual films. In chapter two, I want to use this method to look at a range of films from the vampire genre, and examine what they say about different types of sexuality.

CHAPTER TWO

SEXUAL ANXIETY IN THE VAMPIRE FILM: 1922-1976

In the vampire cinema there are numerous trends, over the period from 1922 to the present day, differing in terms of theme, iconography and narrative patterns. There are difficulties in categorising these, since production of vampire films is not limited to the USA. Contributions to the vampire genre come from as far afield as Japan, Mexico, Belgium, Spain, France, Germany and Malaya. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I want to limit the range to mainly English-speaking productions. I want to use the sexual implications of vampire films as an organising principle, aware that there are other issues - such as the position of vampire films within the horror genre as a whole, which could be used in a wider discussion.

I would argue that the vampire as a sexual deviant is apparent in all the films of this sub-genre. It is built into the myth, via folklore concerning incubi and succubi, and in literature, through the equation of the male vampire with virility, the female with sensuality, and the victim with hidden sexual longings. In film, the sexual aspect is evident, and films usually differ in the degree to which it is made explicit. Within this, there is also the question of what anxiety the vampire is being used as a metaphor for. By looking at the patterns in vampire films, and in particular the way gender determines the role a character will play, I want to show how individual films reflect different points of view, specifically about sexuality.

> There's undoubtedly a queer way of reading vampirism ... I want "queer" here to carry as many meanings as possible. Certainly, I don't just mean lesbian and gay, but any apparently marginalised sexual identity (which

> includes many perceptions of women and non-white, even non-Anglo ethnic groups (Dyer, 1993, p.11).

The first vampire film is taken to be *Nosferatu*. Made by F.W. Murnau in Germany in 1922, it is loosely based on Bram Stoker's story, the English names and places having been replaced by German equivalents. The distinctive features of *Nosferatu* are the portrayal of the vampire and the "German expressionist" style of filming. The vampire, Count Orlock, is hideously portrayed. He is a thin, tall, stooped figure, with a large, bulbous, bare skill, and extended hands and fingers. The iconography surrounding him, rats and deserted streets, connotes disease and death. The film is shot in strong chiaroscuro contract, and the camera is sharply angled to catch the Count at his most threatening. In one shot he is framed by a Gothic arch, while another focuses on his enlarged shadow and outstretched fingers going up a staircase. These visual clues add up to construct a gruesome persona whose only identifiable motive is lust (Fig. 1). "Eyes falling out of his head at the sight of Thomas' sturdy frame, and unable to resist Mina's deadly allure, to identify with him as one still might, is to identify with loneliness, self-hatred and loathsome desire" (Dyer, 1993, p.11). Lane Roth suggests that the film is characteristic of the disillusionism summed up by German Expressionism after the First World War (Roth, 1984, p.248). The position of this vampire figure within the sub-genre is isolated. The use of atmosphere and landscape has been influential. In 1979, Werner Herzog did a remake of the film. But vampires have rarely seemed so depressing. The reason for this, as suggested by Dyer's statement, is that *Nosferatu* represents a sexuality that is well beyond the pale. Audience identification is limited by his physical appearance, and because this is a silent film, he is not in any way

redeemed by a charming personality or any explanations for his behaviour.

A more influential prototype for the modern vampire was Universal Studios' *Dracula* (1931). Bela Lugosi played the lead role in this production, and again it took its cue from Stoker's novel. The difference in this portrayal was that Lugosi brought to the character the ambivalence that Stoker intended. With his foreign accent, prolonged pronunciation, fixed stare and well-groomed appearance, Lugosi made the character physically appealing, socially at ease, and ruthlessly cruel (Fig. 2). This ambivalence has remained the touchstone for most vampire films. It is important as it makes possible the victim's attraction to the vampire and allows portrayals of physical intimacy. "Unlike the normal run of death dealing monsters, classic vampires are therefore permitted a degree of apparent delicacy in their activities, and the physical form in which it became conventional to represent the moment of blood taking, has many of the external signs of the loving and erotic embrace" (Tudor, 1989, p.163). The 1931 *Dracula* did have a sexual element. It was billed as "the strangest love story ever told", and the love scenes were treated in a conventional manner, i.e., Dracula's ladies lay awaiting his arrival in bed, the camera cuts when he arrives, thus suggesting rather than displaying sexual activity. It also reiterated the gender associations of the novel. In this film the vampire is male, evil, and through cunning influence he is able to seduce and oversee the destruction of his mostly female victims. "Female" here is equated with weakness and susceptibility, which is important because the one thing that can defeat the vampire is strength of will. This is afforded to Van Helsing who is praised by the Count for his powers of self-control - "Your will is strong, Van Helsing".

The female characters, on the other hand, cannot resist the pleasures that Dracula seems to offer.

Hammer's cycle of films, which began in 1958 with *Dracula*, was influenced by Universal's blueprint laid out above. They need to be discussed in more detail, however, as their innovations were the catalyst for the vampire trend of the sixties and seventies - 80 per cent of the films in the vampire genre were made after them (Silver & Ursini, 1975, p.123). The success of the Hammer films is attributable to several things. The narrative patterns and iconography were familiar to audiences since they were taken from Stoker's *Dracula*, Sheridan le Fanu's *Carmilla*, and from the Universal films. To these, features were added which gave the films a modern feel, e.g. colour and special effects, and relevance for the horror audience of the sixties and seventies. Silver and Ursini sum this up as a "shift to emphatic and overt elements" (p.123).

In *Dracula* (1958), the director, Terence Fisher, created a genuinely frightening film. Its strength lay in Christopher Lee's and Peter Cushing's detailed portrayal of Dracula and Van Helsing, and in the unabashed way it went about exploring the implications of the myth. Dracula is invested with physical alertness and cruelty, whilst maintaining the appropriate manners and appearance with which to be attractive and influential (Fig. 2). Van Helsing is still a tower of strength. In addition to his knowledge of folklore and religion, his adoption of a pseudo-scientific air makes his semblance appear more modern and useful. His use of the dictaphone adds credence to information such as the vampire's hatred of garlic as it reflects the scientific, and not just the superstitious, part of his character. He states that the vampire may not be able to change shape, and thus does away with one of the more fantastical elements of the myth. Dracula and Van Helsing

represent two extremes: one stands for chaos and indulgence, the other for order and restraint. Dracula's victims, meanwhile, are characterised by naivete and lack of will. Explicit in this reworking of the myth is that it is their own behaviour that has allowed Dracula to wreak havoc in their lives. In the film, a very upper middle class bourgeois atmosphere is created by sets and costumes. The women, Mina and Lucy, wear heavy Victorian garb, accentuating their femininity and connection them with the luxury of their surroundings. The men, Jonathan and Arthur, wear suits, symbols of their status in society. Into this tightly ordered existence comes Dracula. His function is double-edged. He represents evil, is promiscuous and destructive, and in the end is justly destroyed by exposure to light. Against this, however, he illustrates that the "normal" characters have secret and repressed desires that are kept in check by the behaviour codes of the society they live in. Before Dracula's first visit to Lucy, an atmosphere of increasing sexual excitement is achieved by a series of juxtaposed shots. Lucy lies in bed "excitedly fingering the two marks on her neck" (Pirie, 1976, p.86). The camera cuts to the French windows where the wind is rustling in the leaves, back to Lucy on the bed, and then back to the open windows, where "the autumn wind whips up the leaves more violently than ever" (Pirie, 1973, p.86).

This concern with the hypocrisy of Victorian middle class morality is a theme common to many of the Hammer productions. In *Taste the Blood of Dracula* (1969), directed by Peter Sasdy, sexual hypocrisy results in an ironic and violent outcome. The story involves three fathers who are permissive and indulgent, yet terrorise and imprison their children. They visit a brothel, and afterwards conduct a drunken ceremony in a graveyard, inadvertently summoning up Dracula. He becomes the figure of authority the children turn to, possesses them, and causes

them to kill their fathers. The point is that Dracula is a catalyst, speeding up rather than creating the downfall of the deserving characters.

Hammer's innovations can be summarised as follows: they made overt the connection between vampirism and the threat of sexuality. The middle class environment is, on the surface, moral, with sexuality restrained by marriage, family and social expectations. Underneath, however, the characters are capable of the same promiscuity and debauchery as represented by Dracula. Taken a stage further, he can be read as a metaphor for their own displaced anxieties, as the inevitable result of repression and hypocrisy. In a social context, these developments can be seen to parallel changing attitudes in the sixties and seventies. Traditional values such as class and the regulatory role of the family were being questioned. This is evident in the run of social criticism plays which started around that time. For example, *Look Back in Anger* (1956) and *Room at the Top* (1959) also used the "physical setting as the index of social status" in their criticism of the class structure (Roth, 1984, p.25). More importantly, the sixties and seventies are characterised by the "sexual revolution", which linked promiscuity with libertarianism, saw attacks on censorship, and was pervaded by anti-establishment sensibilities. One of the main issues was the role of women in society and changes in the definitions of female sexuality. The vampire film is undoubtedly one of the crucial cultural forms where these changes found expression, albeit in a latent, indirect and symbolic way. The changes in themes within the genre are evidence of the link between the social concern with sexuality and the vampire film. There was a move away from the male vampire figure, to films where female vampires became the focus of attention. Following this, there is the question of the opinions or attitudes the female vampires

were used to represent, i.e., any topical social issue will inevitably involve conflicting views. In this case there were advocators and detractors. At the time, the term "women's lib" was coined by the popular press as a derogatory reference to supporters of the women's movement. Similarly, the increasing use of female vampires and the focus on explicit sex, lesbian and heterosexual, can be seen to refer in one way or another to the issues at hand.

The trend of the "sex-vampire" started around the mid sixties. The popularity and success of the previous Hammer films encouraged the development of new themes and more X-rated material. The films generally centred on female vampires, but the treatment of them varies in a number of ways. The Hammer films which fall under the sex-vampire theme show evidence of two approaches. *Twins of Evil*, made in 1971 (Fig. 3), portrays the female vampires as destructive "libido machines" (Pirie, 1977, p.123). It represents one extreme of the vampire genre, namely the portrayal of "female antagonists who are unmitigatedly evil" (Silver & Ursini, 1975, p.114). The twins are born into a puritan household and much of the activity involves their revenge on the hysterical members of that community. There is a sense in which the destructiveness of the vampires is born out of repression and excessive religious discipline. In one scene, for example, "a lethal crucifix virtually comes into contact with the vampire's exposed pubic hair" (Pirie, 1977, p.123). The role of women in *Twins of Evil* is a development of their position in the earlier Hammer productions. In *Dracula* (1958), Mina and Lucy are the personification of weakness and lack of will. A decade later, "no longer safely domesticated by the restraining structures of family and marriage" (Tudor, 1989, p.174), they have developed into lust-driven, irrational monsters. Again the vampire is a metaphor for a form of transgression. In this case it can be read as

evidence of male fears of the supposed threat posed by the power of female sexuality. The impetus for this, as I have suggested, is to be found in the context of the times and the move away from traditional views of women, the family and the home. "The female vampire, like her male counterpart, embodies an essentially sexual threat to the presumed stability of socio-sexual relations, a threat made all the more comprehensive in her case because it derives from the routinely unrepresented domain of female sexuality" (Tudor, 1989, p.126).

The second approach is more typical of the sex-vampire film. *Lust for a Vampire* (1971) is one of a number of films based on Sheridan le Fanu's *Carmilla*. The original novella dealt with the female vampire's seduction of a young girl. The emphasis is on sensuality, and the girl is portrayed more as a lover than as a victim. The overtly lesbian aspect is emphasised. The narrative centres around a girls' finishing school, at which the female vampire, Mircalla, enrols. The use of the school gives plenty of scope for seduction, and I would argue that the comical way these scenes are arrived at displaces the anxieties that are at the basis of the lesbian content: "Full of furtive adolescent vampirising behind locked doors, whispered assignations by moonlit lakes, and the petty sexual intrigues of the classroom and the dormitory" (Pirie, 1977, p.121). In one scene, Mircalla and her friend swim naked in a lake and kiss. This is typical of the use of nude scenes in the film, and indeed the narrative is geared towards long visual scenes of sexual intimacy (Fig. 4). Considering the sexual emphasis in *Lust for a Vampire* and the fact that the main horror audience is male, this film is mainly a spectacle for voyeurism. It can't be read as any objective portrayal of lesbian sexuality since the vampire in the end is killed. "Narrative implications are constantly undercut by the manner in which the tale is told, the threat of female

sexuality is diffused both by narrative closure - most of these vampires are finally eliminated - and by subjecting the women involved to male erotic contemplation" (Tudor, 1989, p.174).

The sex-vampire was, however, approached from different directions in a number of European productions. *Daughters of Darkness* was made in 1970 by the Belgian director, Harry Kumel. The film begins with a young couple making love on a train, on return from their honeymoon. They arrive in Ostend and check into a hotel with two women as the only other guests. Both are vampires. The elder of the two is Countess Bathory, the historical figure reincarnated, dressed in silver lamé and reminiscent of a thirties vamp. The other is her servant. In the ensuing mayhem, the relationship between the husband and wife is revealed to be sadistic. The Countess becomes aware of this and works her way into their affairs. She seduces the wife and gets her servant to do the same to the husband. Both of the latter are killed. The Countess and her new lover leave the hotel, but in an attempt to escape the sun's rays, the Countess is impaled on a tree.

The film reworks the myth in a number of ways. Firstly, by highlighting the couple's sadomasochistic relationship, the "otherness" of the vampires is presented as less extreme. In the classic vampire film, the male husband or lover is not seen as in any way responsible for his wife or lover's infidelity. He doesn't have to question his own sexuality since he is not competing with normal, i.e., heterosexual, human desire, but with a supernatural force. Here, however, the husband's sadistic behaviour is part of the reason for his wife's engagement in a lesbian relationship. As a result, for a male audience, any potentially voyeuristic scenes are undercut by this man's sadism, his troubling inability to keep his wife satisfied and happy, and his subsequent death. This film can be read from a feminist point of view. It

hints at the innate sadism of a heterosexual relationship and changes around the usual ending as the male is killed and the female survives. It can also be read as restricted to a lesbian audience, the perversities of a heterosexual relationship having been discarded for the more attractive lesbian options provided by the vampire (Zimmerman, 1984, p.161).

A similar approach was taken by the French director, Jean Rollins, in a series of vampire films. His most successful, *Les Frissons des Vampires*, made in 1970, utilised visual imagery and suggestive cross-cutting over plot and narrative. The plot device of the honeymooning couple as a way of leading into the bizarre world of vampirism and visual excess is again used here. The couple visit their cousins' castle to find out that they are dead. Two female servants live on and invite them to stay. It becomes apparent that the cousins are undead, rather than dead, and have been transformed into vampires. The female vampire Isolde typifies what Rollins has to say about vampirism. She is lesbian, and, through costume and character, is portrayed as sadomasochistic and dominating - leather boots and body piercings attached to lengths of metal chain. Vampirism here is a form of indulgent sexual experimentation, a "luxuriant sexual perversion ... bizarre beach climax in which the honeymooning wife is ecstatically reunited with the vampire cousins, only for all three of them to be destroyed in a conclusive orgasm of pain by the sun's rays" (Pirie, 1977, p.106). The journey motif, used in classic vampire films to express a sense of the unknown, is subverted here, as the woman decides she want to stay, finding the vampire lifestyle more interesting that the marriage she's just entered into. Also, the action takes place in the castle, and is limited to exploring the vampire lifestyle. It avoids the usual dramatic device of cutting from the castle to a

domestic setting. In short, it isn't about the threat of sexual difference, dealing rather with characters who experiment with and indulge in it.

Outside the sex-vampire film, the main development within vampire films and the horror genre as a whole involved placing the monster in modern, urban settings. The vampire had travelled the road from obscure foreign locations and had arrived in the suburbs, bringing with it the threat that had previously been kept at a geographical distance - "no longer safely insulated in mythic history" (Tudor, 1989, p.66). The vampires were closer at hand, and did not confine themselves to attacking honeymooning couples or the middle class. Neither could the traditional expert be relied upon to get rid of them, and the traditional methods, or at least the Christian symbols, began to lose their potency.

Martin, made by George Romero in 1976, is a good example of the modern, urban vampire. He is a sceptical teenager who doesn't fully believe in his vampire status. He chews garlic and plays with a crucifix. He does, however, walk the streets in search of blood. He chooses victims and puts them to sleep with an injection. His victims are usually young women, and he strokes and plays with them before cutting a vein and drinking their blood (Fig. 5). There is no need to search for sexual allegory in this film since Martin's vampirism is his sexuality and the plot of the film builds up to the moment when he can have intercourse - "Some day, maybe I'll get to do it awake without the blood part". This proves unsuccessful as, even when he does manage to have sex, it leaves him confused and still in need of blood. In the end he is staked, having been mistakenly blamed for the death of his new lover.

By looking at the individual films and the trends within the vampire genre, and by situating them historically, it is possible to work out what they say about sexuality. I would argue that the myth has been used most consistently in films to look at and express an opinion about marginalised sexual identities. The vampire is a symbol for sexual deviation and excess, and the cipher who invokes the lust of others. The exact nature of his/her sexuality varies and depends on the iconography, narrative patterns and characterisation employed by individual films. For example, Nosferatu is the personification of repulsive desire. He is socially alienated, and although his victims shy away from sexual contact with him, the film implies that there is an attraction in repugnance. Universal's Dracula of 1931 is sexually active, potent and evil. He is liberating, especially when placed in a Victorian social setting, and yet too extreme for that suffocatingly repressed society.

The sexual difference that each and every vampire represents can also be seen to have a social bias. For example, the "otherness" that the sex-vampire stood for was female sexuality. As I have shown, this is linked to the change in attitudes towards women and their role in society. This change in attitude was reflected by social movement which gathered momentum in the sixties and seventies. The sex-vampire trend also took place at that time.

The vampire, and the sexuality that he or she represents, translates as a social concern, and this is relevant to the time when and the place where the films were made. Further to this, individual films can be read as commentaries on the issue in question. In *Twins of Evil* female sexuality is portrayed as destructive, whereas in *Daughters of Darkness* it is given a more complex reading - the lesbian relationship is viewed as an attractive alternative to a heterosexual one. There-

fore, the nature of the sexuality shown and the position it is viewed from differs from film to film.

> The old as well as the new connotations of queer, the despicable answers as well as the defiant, the shameful as well as the unashamed, the loathing of oddness as well as pride in it. The vampire has played every variation on such queerness (Dyer, 1993, p.11).

CONCLUSION

All of this goes some way towards making intellectual sense of the vampire film. As a horror sub-genre it is less obviously connected to society than the western or the gangster movie. These are more obviously rooted in history and society, and by comparison, the vampire film deals with often vague metaphors. However, I would suggest that the myth is ambiguous because it is a symbol for unpalatable behaviour and inexplicable events. As I have shown, it is possible, by using a "correspondence theory", to explain the nature of the displaced anxieties and place them in a social context. In short, the vampire film is about insecurity and paranoia over identity and sexual orientation and the threat that comes from being "in the dark".

In the next chapter, I want to bring the analysis up to date by looking at two more recent vampire films, *Near Dark* (1987), directed by Kathryn Bigelow, and *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1993), directed by Francis Ford Coppola. These films represent two reworkings of the myth. I want to examine what they say about sexuality and see if this is relevant to sexual concerns in contemporary society.

CHAPTER THREE

CONTEMPORARY FEARS IN NEAR DARK AND BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA

NEAR DARK (1987)

Near Dark opens at night with a chat-up scene between a good-looking country boy, Caleb, and a street-wise girl, Mae. She asks for a lift and they both go off in his truck. What follows is a typical cat and mouse game, where he tries to make a pass and she ignores him, changing the conversation. Bemused, but thinking his luck is in, Caleb stops the truck at Mae's request:

Mae: There's somethin' I want to show you.

Caleb: Somethin' you want to show me?

Mae: Yeah. The night.

Caleb: What about it?

Mae: It's dark.

Caleb: I noticed.

Mae: It's also bright. It will blind you.

Caleb: I can't see.

Mae: Well listen. Do you hear it?

Caleb: I'm listening. I don't hear nothin'.

Mae: Well listen harder, do you hear it?

Caleb: What?

Mae: The night. It's deafening.

Caleb: Hold your ears.

Mae: Listen hard.

Caleb: I sure haven't met many girls like you.

Mae: No, you haven't met any girls like me. Look up.

Caleb: The stars.

Mae: See that one.

Caleb: First one I laid eyes on.

Mae: The light leaving that star right now will take a billion years to get down here. You want to know why you haven't met a girl like me before?

Caleb: Why?

Mae: Because I'll still be here when the light from that star gets down here to earth. In a billion years.

Caleb: That sounds like fun.

Mae: It is.

Caleb: I'd like to be there too.

Mae: Maybe.

Caleb: How?

Mae: Who knows.

Mae is a vampire, and during the couple's kisses and embraces, she bites Caleb. The sun slowly begins to come up and Mae jumps out of the truck, fearful of the approaching dawn, and runs off. Caleb can't start the truck and starts walking home. The fact that he is changing into a vampire becomes obvious as he stumbles across the dusty ploughed land and his skin and clothes begin to smoulder. The camera cuts to his farm where his father and sister are working. His sister sees him stumbling and alerts her father. Into view comes a camper van. It drives up alongside Caleb, a door is flung open and he is pulled inside. Father and sister are left shouting as the van is driven away. Caleb has been kidnapped by the other members of Mae's gang. They are about

to kill him when Mae reveals that "he's been bit" and is now one of them.

Thus, the long opening sequence sets up the atmosphere for the rest of the film. Caleb is on his way to becoming a vampire, and he has fallen in love with Mae. The film's narrative is built around the conflicting impulses he has to contend with. His acceptance by the group depends on whether or not he will adapt to their rules, i.e., survive by killing and drinking blood. In doing so, he must reject the society he was a part of, replace day with night, and his father and sister with the vampire group and their survival. This conflict, and the notion of moving from one social group to another, is emphasised by the "road movie" style of the film. Most of the attention is on the vampires, but this shifts now and then to Caleb's father and sister and the journey they have undertaken to find him. Writer and director Kathryn Bigelow thus opens up the narrative with different points of view. On the one hand, the events are seen from the vampires' perspective. They rampage through small town America, and their exhilarating way of life is contrasted with the boredom and stifling lack of opportunity in the rural mid-west. They are subversive, having rejected normality for excitement and a sense of control over their own lives. In the bar scene, they show contempt for ordinariness. The typical pool room boys, the dumb waitress and the middle-aged barman are teased and killed off by the vampires in a series of grisly ways. They turn murder into a party and laugh at the shocked reactions. The bar murders are synchronised with the song "Fever" and the orgy ends with the line "What a lovely way to burn". The iconography surrounding the vampires symbolises discontent, danger and excitement. Severim is the wild boy of the group. He wears a leather jacket and sunglasses, kills with a flick-knife built into his boot, steals cars and generally does whatever he chooses to. The film's

representation of rural America, with its stock images of small motels, local bars and hardened police, lends a certain sympathy towards this kind of behaviour.

Caleb's father and sister are portrayed as honest, likable and genuinely concerned. Faced with an unhelpful and lethargic reaction from the police, they take off to find Caleb themselves. The film is not a simple black and white spectacle of good versus evil. Both Caleb's family and the vampires are faced with an inhospitable environment. The former survive by working, looking after each other, and in the process stay humble, honest and clear-sighted. The latter opt for chaos, indulgence and the excitement of living outside of normality. The narrative resolves this conflict by emphasising literally the idea of infection. Caleb takes part in pleasures that are new to him. The effects are stimulating and liberating, but inevitably dangerous and life-threatening. His family eventually catch up with him, snatch him away from the vampires and bring him home. His father reacts sympathetically to his disease, and performs a blood transfusion, thereby purifying the infection. Mae goes in search of Caleb and, finding him transformed, chooses to trade the night and all its excitement for security and love with him. The rest of the vampires are burnt alive by the sun.

Near Dark thus explores both the excitement and danger of living outside of society and beyond social rules. The film expresses a number of contemporary fears. There is the anxiety surrounding the ability of the family to survive the disenchantment of American society. There is also the fear of the alternatives open to discontented members of the younger generation. The visual emphasis on blood and teeth and the equipment used in the transfusion emphasise the dangers inherent in physical and sexual indulgence, i.e., death by AIDS or drug addiction,

and at the same time, the film is aware of the desire individuals have for freedom, control and pleasure.

BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA (1993)

Bram Stoker's Dracula by Francis Ford Coppola is, as the title suggests, a very faithful interpretation of the classic vampire novel. The main divergence from the novel is the introduction of the historical figure Vlad the Impaler in the film's prologue. Here, we see Vlad leading a holy crusade against the Turks. He returns from battle to find that his lover, thinking that he has been killed, has committed suicide. Vlad blames God for this ill-fated accident and takes his revenge by subverting everything he had previously believed in. Thus the hero turns anti-hero, the Christian becomes the enemy of Christ, and the defender of humanity becomes the parasite that drains life from it, i.e., Vlad becomes Dracula, corrupt, vengeful, yet eternally searching for his lost love.

The prologue offers an explanation for Vlad's transformation into Dracula. In doing so, it expands on the limited point of view the vampire is given in the novel, and portrays him as more human, understandable and more complex. There is also an emphasis on the differences and inconsistencies of Dracula's personality. On the one hand, he is utterly repulsive. In the distinctly homoerotic scene where Jonathan cuts himself shaving, for example, Dracula, feigning pity, takes the bloody razor and slides it across his tongue, slithering and shaking with pleasure. And yet there is no suggestion here of inherent evil, rather sympathy for him is encouraged by the "lost love" theme of the prologue.

The vampire in *Bram Stoker's Dracula* is essentially a sexual threat. The theme of sexual difference is made overt by the elaborate

and symbolic costumes. In the castle, Jonathan is seduced by Dracula's brides. On a seemingly endless bed, they literally eat the sensitive and proper Jonathan alive. He is unable to resist their exoticism and voluptuousness - an unrestrained sexuality symbolised by one of the brides whose hair is a mass of writhing snakes. In this sequence, Dracula, in dress and appearance, is symbolic of a soul deformed by subversion and corruption. His bright red cloak embroidered with golden dragons, his withered skin, black eyes, sharpened nail and camp hairpiece indicate his affinity with the occult and unorthodox blood ceremonies (Fig. 6). This is just one aspect of Dracula's sexuality, however, and the remainder are given expression with his arrival in London.

By placing the events within a Victorian social setting, with its connotations of sexual repression, Dracula can be read as representative of the typical Victorian's secret desires. To Lucy, stifled by conventional morality, he represents the attraction of sexual indulgence. She is magnetically drawn to the wolf-like creature who takes her in the garden. For Mina, he holds all the exciting elements of love lacking in her relationship with Jonathan. In this manifestation he is a dandy, dressed in a grey suit and top hat, his eyes hidden mysteriously behind blue-tinted glasses. He is the unorthodox dream who offers her immortality in the form of an unexplored and complete love. In the asylum, he appears to Renfield in the form of a green mist. The master-servant role-playing here is indicative of sadomasochism. Renfield is addicted to the horror Dracula instills in him, and Dracula is disgusted by him but eager for such easy pleasure. Even Van Helsing is affected, momentarily losing his propriety and briefly succumbing to Mina's deranged offer of sensual pleasure.

Thus, Dracula has a liberating effect on the society he invades, though there are prices to be paid for this. Lucy pays the price for literally sleeping around. She is transformed into an insatiable monster, "The lace ruffs around her neck are puffed like a monstrous lizard. Even her cheeks seem fuller. Even without the red she is the embodiment of engorgement" (Dyer, 1993, p.10). The connection between her death, promiscuity and disease is made apparent by Van Helsing's statement: "The syphilisation of civilisation", and although the film is set in the Victorian era, this translates for nowadays as a general acknowledgement of the threat of AIDS.

In the final sequence of the film, the concept of Dracula as an ill-fated lover emerges as the key theme. Dracula has fled back to Transylvania, as each of his refuges in London has been defiled by Van Helsing. The Professor and Lucy's husband, Arthur, chase after him to kill him and thus prevent Mina's transformation into a vampire. Amidst the fantastical surroundings of Dracula's castle, Mina is used as the bait to attract him. The final slaying takes the form of a sword through his heart, a violent, though necessary measure. Thus, the phantom doomed to endless limbo is mercifully laid to rest. The film ends with the transformation of the aged and bloody vampire into his original incarnation as Vlad the Impaler.

Bram Stoker's Dracula thus expresses some very general concerns about sexuality. Dracula's polymorphous sexuality, symbolised by the wolf, the dandy, the insidious green mist and the perverse priest of the occult, represents the fears and desires of the rest of the story's characters. The ending highlights the dangers of sexual experimentation, which is apt in today's climate of fear over sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS. The film also alludes to the idea of people being by nature pleasure-seeking animals, and illustrates the conflict that arises out of behaving indulgently in an apparently ordered society.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this analysis of the vampire cinema, and individual films, illustrates that the theme of sexuality is the basis of the vampire myth. Films differ in terms of the type of sexuality they refer to. They also vary on how they comment on it, i.e., the sexual "otherness" can be seen as fearful and threatening, as liberating and thrilling, or as a mixture of these emotions. By examining the codes and conventions of vampire films, it is possible to work out what point is being made. Further to this, the issues explored in vampire films have a social basis. In *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1993), numerous fears about sexuality are very loosely explored, and as a result, they can be seen to reflect very general social concerns. In *Near Dark* (1987), the idea of indulgence leading to danger is specifically and coherently explored. By placing the events firmly in contemporary society, the connection between the two is made explicit.

In short, vampire films perform a function. Like the fairytale or the cartoon, they communicate information that is relevant in a way that is accessible and entertaining. It remains to be seen if, and how, the popularity of the vampire myth can be adapted to successive cultures and tastes, and if the current intrigue surrounding the filming of shooting star Neil Jordan's cinematic adaptation of Anne Rice's *Interview With the Vampire* is indeed due to the contemporary relevance of the sexual symbolism inherent in the vampire film, and if the film will not be merely another addition to the recent brace of visually glamorous interpretations of the myth which could be viewed, albeit cynically, as simply fashion. Of course, rumours of Tom Cruise in the lead role which

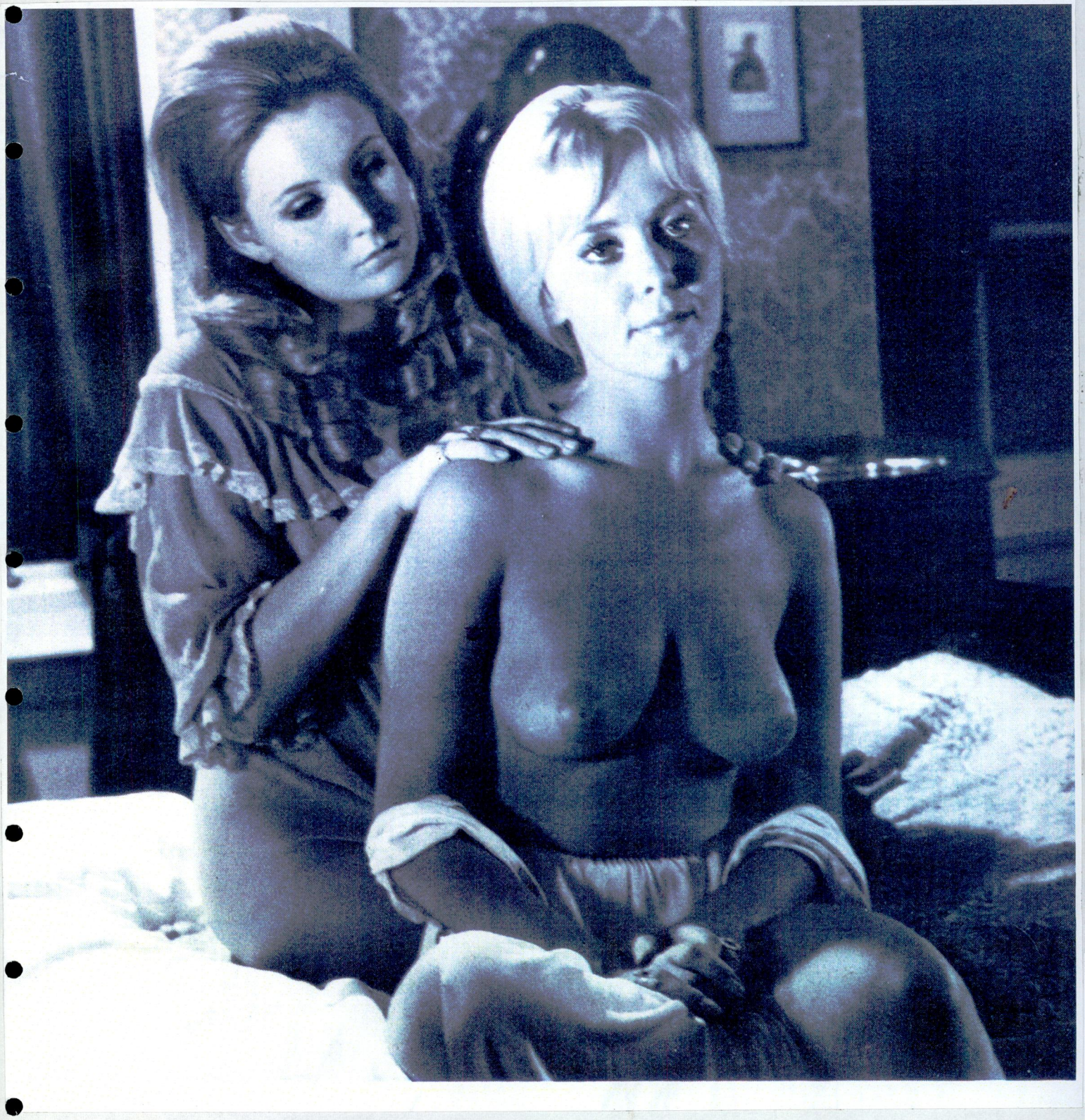
began many months ago meant that, for me at least, the entire project was instantly robbed of both credibility and a reason not to be repelled by the idea of someone so implicitly antiseptic and offensively banal in a part he cannot possibly have the faintest understanding of.

1.

BELA LUGOSI AS DRACULA.

CHRISTOPHER LEE AS DRACULA.

3.



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