

A taste of the gothic: film and television versions of Dracula

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A Taste of the Gothic:

Film and Television Versions of *Dracula*

Jonathan Bignell

The genre of Gothic literature is difficult to define. I shall give a brief explanation of what is meant by the Gothic in literature, then narrow my focus onto *Dracula* and adaptations of the novel in TV and especially film. I shall attempt briefly to both describe the extent of *Dracula's* penetration into the film and TV media, and also to account for the fascination with this character and story. Victor Sage has characterised a diverse group of historical romance novels of the eighteenth century, including for example Lewis' *The Monk* (1796) and Mrs Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), as offering to their contemporary readers an experience of terror and sublime feeling.¹ This group of novels Sage calls 'the Gothick', a first surge of cultish popular fiction which was then followed by nineteenth century reelaborations of supernatural and macabre themes in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1820) and novels by Wilkie Collins, Edgar Allen Poe and Bram Stoker, for example. It is this later nineteenth century phase of popular writing which is now normally termed the Gothic (without the 'k'), including works like *The Woman in White* (1860), *Dracula* (1897) and *A Turn of the Screw* (1898).

Thus Stoker's *Dracula* was far from an isolated example of fiction about the eruption of unnatural creatures into the comfort of English society and into the apparently secure world of the middle-class home; by the end of the nineteenth century the literary tradition of the Englishman confronting savage beasts at home

and abroad was firmly established. Around the same time that *Dracula* was published, the security of the private sphere (home and family) and of the public sphere (nation and Empire) was violated in fiction by, for instance, the Beast People in H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896, filmed in 1996), and by the under-evolved and uncivilised creature Dr Jekyll in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886, most recently filmed in 1996 as *Mary Reilly*).

We should recall that the England of the late nineteenth century was regarded as the highest point of human civilisation, when industrial technology and the power of science appeared to offer a thoroughgoing conquest of nature. But such assurance brought with it a fear of relapse into a savage past, and an anxiety about other forces (especially those within the psyche) which had yet to be explained. Victorians were afraid of degeneration back to a pre-civilised state, known as atavism. Dracula's origin in the 'backward' east of Europe, his unrestrained 'primitive' appetite and sexuality are among the characteristics which made him alien and fearful to Britons. But he is also at home in modern London, strolling the streets like a cosmopolitan urbanite. Similarly, the central characters in the novel try to use modern technology to catch Dracula, primarily by recording information and producing writing, and also by travelling on the new pan-European rail networks and using modern medical science. However, what succeeds are the weapons of pre-urbanised culture, the garlic and wooden stakes of superstition and myth. What we find in the Gothic are attempts to reconcile contradictions between, for instance, civilisation and primitivism, rationality and superstition. A helpful phrase which Sage uses to describe all this fiction, 'equivocal explanation of irrational phenomena', might not be sufficient in itself to distinguish a whole genre of writing, but it points economically to some of

the issues which I want to discuss here in relation to the Gothic, and in particular versions of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.²

Both cinema and the novel are narrative media, and it is hardly surprising that film and television have adapted novels for the screen. Starting from Sage's phrase – the 'equivocal explanation of irrational phenomena' – we can begin to see how the Gothic novel is suited for film and TV adaptation. Ghosts, vampires, telepathic communication, transformations of the body, and unexplained appearance and disappearance are all 'irrational phenomena' which are routinely found in Gothic fiction and which the technical properties of the film and television media can render as if real. The iconic quality of the visual signs of film and TV, whereby the two-dimensional image appears to render three-dimensional objects faithfully, gives the stamp of authenticity to what is seen on the screen, while electronic recording technologies also simulate sounds in a generally realistic way. 'Phenomena' are things which are perceived to exist, yet these existent things are not susceptible to 'rational' investigation; they remain real, but in a particular and limited sense. Gothic fiction and film and television fictions, since they are narrative forms, are occupied with 'explanation' of these phenomena, in the sense that they portray them and account for them in a way which allows the reader or viewer to accept them in the context of a narrative. But at the same time these narratives convey their shocking and uncanny characteristics through equivocation; by failing to provide enough information for a rational explanation to do away entirely with their emotional and psychological effects.

Gothic then, in its literary and its contemporary media forms, is constituted by two sets of features which are themselves composed of radically different elements. Irrational phenomena lead us both to the realism of what seems phenomenologically

true, but also to the uncertainty of the fantastic. Equivocal explanation offers us the linearity and closure of a narrative account, but an account which will not deliver a quotidian solution to the enigmas which are presented to us. This rich mixture of the believable and the unbelievable, the coherent account and the accumulation of startling moments of intense experience, are perhaps the source of the power of the Gothic for its readers and for the audiences of adaptations in film and TV. But this internal mixing in the genre has also been the reason for the devaluation of Stoker's novel and other examples of the Gothic, which were not regarded as 'literary' in their day, but as entertaining thrillers. The highbrow literary magazine *The Athenaeum* reviewed *Dracula* in 1897, concluding that the novel

is highly sensational, but it is wanting in the constructive art as well as in the higher literary sense. It reads at times like a mere series of grotesquely incredible events.... Still, Mr Stoker has got together a number of 'horrid details', and his object, assuming it to be ghastriness, is fairly well fulfilled. Isolated scenes and touches are probably quite uncanny enough to please those for whom they are designed.³

There is a definite implication here that readers of the novel are people likely to be seduced by the 'ghastliness' of the tale, and not sufficiently discerning to notice its apparent failings in literariness. Despite the striking sensations which are produced by the writing, and yet because of their presence, the novel is said to be incoherent, disjointed, and an accumulation of moments rather than a flowing narrative.

The problem with *Dracula*, it seems, is that it can suspend the reader's critical faculties and draws him or her into the role of a duped consumer. We might even argue that the effect of the novel on its readers is parallel to the effect of *Dracula* on his victims: just as *Dracula* enslaves women to an appetite for excessive consumption

of blood and frees them from civilised inhibitions, so *Dracula* turns readers into indiscriminate consumers of fiction and deprives them of educated judgement.⁴ But the pleasure of this absorption in the narrative was described much more positively by another reviewer, in the *Daily Mail* newspaper in the same year:

By ten o'clock the story had so fastened itself upon our attention that we could not even pause to light our pipe. At midnight the narrative had fairly got on our nerves; a creepy terror had seized upon us, and when, at length, in the early hours of the morning, we went upstairs to bed it was with the anticipation of nightmare.⁵

Here there is a relish in the pleasures of being seduced and made to forget the everyday (like lighting one's pipe). The ambiguity of the phrase 'got on our nerves' tells both of the potentially unsettling loss of control which reading produces, while also testifying to the un-nerving thrill of the emotions generated in response to the text. The effects of the text, which has insinuated itself enough to produce nightmares after finishing the book, are both pleasurable and threatening to the reader's sense of self.

This kind of reaction to fiction, in both written and visual forms, can still be seen today in responses to paperback horror fiction, slasher films, 'body horror' and other 'video nasties', and some graphic novels. While Stoker's novel played on the anxieties of its time, contemporary film and TV Draculas recast the story in order to address the fears of our own time. One of the criticisms of a recent *Dracula*, Coppola's 1992 film version, was that the film is loaded both with the subtexts of Stoker's novel and also with an excess of contemporary subtexts (for example AIDS and drug addiction).⁶ Because *Dracula* is so familiar, its story can be written-over on top of the original text and filled with new allusions and themes. *Dracula* then, was

the pulp fiction of its day, both castigated and enjoyed for its ability to fascinate and absorb its readers, and the fact that the novel has been in print continuously since first publication shows both the endurance of its appeal and its openness to contemporary reinterpretations.⁷

If we turn to more recent published versions of Stoker's *Dracula*, and examine the publicity blurb on the back of the recent Oxford World's Classics edition, the terms of evaluation have changed. The blurb points out that to read Stoker is to return to the source of the *Dracula* story, and that the text is now considered a 'classic' novel. It promises the reader or viewer a fascinating and seductive experience, repeating the focus on 'irrational phenomena' and their attractions.

The *Dracula* mythology has inspired a vast subculture, but the story has never been better told than by Stoker. He succeeds entirely in his aim to terrify. His myth is powerful because it allows evil to remain mysterious. Virtuous action has no more impact than Jonathan Harker's shovel. The high virtue of Lucy can simply be drained away, as her blood is drained away, until she too joins the vampire brood. Van Helsing's high-thinking and scientific skill cannot resist the dreadful potency of the undead. Only the old magic - a crucifix, garlic, a wooden stake - can provide effective weapons against the Count's appalling power.⁸

Stoker is now offered as a writer of consummate skill, rather than the peddler of sensation. His 'aim to terrify' is now a legitimate goal, and his creation of *Dracula* acquires the status of an origin for a 'vast subculture' of popular fiction. The blurb contrasts what were the elite values of Victorian culture, 'virtuous action', 'high-thinking and scientific skill' with the fascination of the irrational, 'the dreadful power of the undead' and 'the Count's appalling power'. Just as the effectiveness of 'the old

magic' of pre-rational belief overcomes Dracula, so the century-old original text authored and authorised by Stoker is claimed to exceed its more contemporary popularisations. So while the ingredients of the Gothic remain basically 'the equivocal explanation of irrational phenomena', the evaluation of these components has changed in the new context of twentieth-century culture and the shifting hierarchy of rational and irrational, popular cultural fascination and high-cultural literariness.⁹

It would be incorrect to suggest that the visual media have entirely supplanted the popularity of written versions of the story. While film and TV adaptations could be called parasitic on the literary text, they have nevertheless breathed new life into the literary version, so that in 1992 when Coppola's film *Bram Stoker's Dracula* was released in the USA, the novel appeared in the American bestseller lists. The film also gave rise to the book of the film by James Hart (the film's scriptwriter) and Fred Saberhagen (an American writer of vampire fiction). Hart contributed his own preface to the novelisation, in which he recommends that his readers should also read Stoker. Hart's and Saberhagen's text is an assemblage of various other kinds of text, including an afterword by Coppola, stills from the film and photographs showing the making of the film, and extensive re-use of extracts from Stoker's *Dracula*.

Stoker's novel, too, in common with many Gothic fictions, is composed of a range of different discursive forms. The story takes shape from the journals kept by various characters, newspaper reports, letters, and transcriptions of phonograph recordings. As the character Jonathan Harker notes at the end of the novel, 'in all the mass of material of which the record is composed, there is hardly one authentic document; nothing but a mass of typewriting'.¹⁰ In the Gothic, readers (and the protagonists) are presented with ambiguous and partial information, which it is their task to decode. This extends from the construction of texts from corrupt and partial

sources (like the pages of journals, newspapers, or legal documents), to the scattering through the novels of portraits, dreams, and other kinds of image.¹¹ Each of these sources of information appears to offer the reader or protagonist access to knowledge, but each plays a teasing game of veiling its true significance. The decipherment of what can be seen on the surface hints at, but does not give access to, a depth beneath it. This technique makes the 'irrational phenomena' of the story subject to 'equivocal explanation', since the story is disjointed and multiply narrated from different points of view. But it also thematises the fact that what we read is always a later meditation on the action, a constructed record made up of layers of subsequent commentary.

This method of deferring presentation by multiplying the layers of intervening commentary is set against the immediacy and believability of what is described.

These two forces in 'equivocal explanation', of veiling and showing, are evident not only in Stoker's narrative technique but also in Hart's and Saberhagen's novelisation of the film. The novelisation is presented as being true to what Stoker intended, and the authors returned to his sources to unveil the 'real' story. But the occasion for the novelisation was the film, and photographs show the actors and Coppola on the set, creating the illusion which we see on the cinema screen. Hart and Saberhagen return to Stoker, but more than this, they return to the sources of his novel to show what Stoker kept veiled. Hart and Saberhagen return to the film in order to re-present it in writing, but also lift the veil on the production process and shown how it was made. Not only are there two origins for the novelisation (Stoker's *Dracula* and Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*), but each of these origins is itself a partial telling, which it seems must also be peeled away to reveal the sources from which they derived.

To add a final twist, when Stoker wrote *Dracula* he was adapting literary versions of vampirism going back at least to the early nineteenth century.¹² The

impossible quest for the origins of the story is alluded to in the publisher's blurb on the back of Hart's and Saberhagen's novel:

A legendary evil inspires a motion picture event. The ultimate retelling of a story that has mesmerised readers for more than a century. Here is the extraordinary story of a creature possessed of an irresistible sexuality and a powerful evil as old as time itself. This unforgettable classic of darkly erotic horror is now a magnificent motion picture from Francis Ford Coppola, featuring an internationally celebrated cast. Including eight pages of stunning colour photographs.¹³

Of course the aims of this blurb are primarily to sell the novelisation, and to proclaim the significance and power of the film *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. But there is a confusion between the authorities which are being appealed to in it. The 'legendary evil' is that of Dracula, whose origins are lost in 'legend' and whose evil is 'as old as time itself'. But the story's literary origins are historically fairly specific, having existed for 'more than a century' as an 'unforgettable classic', evidently a reference to Stoker. And yet the film is authorised by the name of its director, Coppola, and the authority of the film as proper conduit of the story is proclaimed by the blurb on the back of the Columbia Tristar videotape of the film, which announces that 'Coppola returns to the original source of the Dracula myth, and from that gothic romance, he creates a modern masterpiece'.¹⁴ Coppola's role as author is also emphasised by the inclusion of the photographs which supplement the 1992 novelisation. While we continue to find allusions to the irrational fascination of the story, in its power to 'mesmerise' readers, there is also a drive to explain this power by attaching it to an authorising source. But the source is indefinitely located either in the Dracula of popular superstition and legend, or in Stoker's historically-specific publication, or in

Coppola's authentic realisation, which is itself recast in written form and whose production process is partially explained by behind-the-scenes photographs.

This brief look at a few of the written texts of *Dracula* shows that the story (and, I would argue, Gothic in general) has an unstable position in relation to the borderline between sensational or 'popular' writing and literary fiction. The story's shifts between being critiqued as a potboiler and applauded as a classic novel are also parallel to the ambiguity about its contemporary status as a predominantly literary work or a staple of film and television culture. While it is certainly true that many more people today experience *Dracula* primarily through visual representations, the fortunes of Stoker's novel and other written reworkings have been significantly and positively affected by the circulation of *Dracula* films and television adaptations. Without succumbing too easily to the metaphors of infection and transformation which crop up all too frequently in critical work on the *Dracula* myth, it would be accurate to suggest that *Dracula* crosses and recrosses the boundaries between written and visual forms, and is dead in neither. His true home and origin cannot be pinned down definitively, and the attempts to fix and evaluate this 'irrational phenomena' seem doomed to remain as 'equivocal explanations'. Some of the same problems of lineage and origin will also become evident as we examine the evolution of film and television adaptations of *Dracula*.

Adaptations of *Dracula* draw not only on the novel itself but on the literary vampire tradition and theatre adaptations of these stories.¹⁵ Many of the themes, character-types, settings and effects in *Dracula* had already been used in a variety of forms. Vampires in literature began with John Polidori's story 'The Vampyre: A Tale' of 1819, written after Lord Byron, Polidori and Mary Shelley (who produced *Frankenstein* (1818) at the time) decided to write thrilling stories when bored in

Switzerland in 1816. A stage version of Polidori's vampire story was produced in 1820, and an opera version in 1828. The melodrama producer Dion Boucicault produced *The Vampyre: A Phantasm* on stage in 1852, another version of Polidori's story, and this was performed as *The Phantom* in the USA in 1856. A long, melodramatic and downmarket vampire story, *Varney the Vampyre: Or, the Feast of Blood* by John Rymer was published in forty-five instalments from 1845-47, while a more literary vampire novel, *Carmilla* by Sheridan LeFanu, was published in 1872. While the character of Dracula was Stoker's invention, the vampire tradition spans both novel, short story, serial publication, popular theatre and opera.

There have been very many film and television adaptations of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* itself, which was first published the year before the Lumière brothers opened the first public cinema auditorium in London in 1896. According to Ken Gelder more than 3,000 films featuring vampires have been made, by no means all of them versions of Stoker's story.¹⁶ But each vampire film needs to connect sufficiently with the viewer's knowledge of vampire lore to sustain the fiction, while also departing enough from earlier films to establish its own identity as a self-sufficient text. This process of accretion of meanings, retellings, adaptations and returns to the 'original' story leave Gothic adaptations in film and TV as open and discontinuous texts, addressing multiple audience constituencies and activating multiple references and resonances in their viewers. I shall focus on some of the better-known films which derive from Stoker's novel, rather than the genre of vampire films as a whole, though there are obviously relationships between these two groups of films and the boundary between them is sometimes not easy to establish. In 1992, the year that Francis Ford Coppola's film *Bram Stoker's Dracula* was finished, about twenty-five

vampire films were in production. But as denoted by its title, Coppola's film was the only one which explicitly claimed to be an adaptation of Stoker's novel.

Just as we should see Stoker's novel in the context of a literary genre and its history, so too we should see *Draculas* on film and television in the context of the genres and histories of cinema and TV. There has been a tradition of horror film since the early decades of film production, and this Gothic horror genre has also been evident in television, not only in TV versions of *Dracula* and other Gothic novels, but also in 'original' dramas which are not adaptations of a text, and in the screening on television of films made originally for cinema showing. In any year's TV output in Britain, the USA or any other nation, we can find TV adaptations of texts in the Gothic tradition, TV screenings of film versions of *Dracula* and other vampire or Gothic horror films, and new drama like *The X Files* or *Twin Peaks* whose appeal is also based on 'equivocal explanation of irrational phenomena' and which make use of Gothic characteristics.

The first known film adaptation of Stoker's novel was the Hungarian *Drakula* (1920), an unauthorised adaptation now considered a 'lost film'. Similarly, *Nosferatu: Eine Symphonie des Gruuens (Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror)* (1922), was a German adaptation of the novel directed by F. W. Murnau, produced without copyright authorisation from Stoker's widow, who owned the rights to the novel after Stoker's death. She obtained a court order for all copies to be destroyed, but the film can still be seen, reconstructed from surviving prints, and is considered to be relatively faithful to the novel in its representation of character and incident. *Dracula* in Murnau's film is a tall, skinny, emaciated figure, with a bald head, a row of long rat-like teeth, and long bony claw-like fingers. He is far from the elegant lounge-lizard seducer portrayed in later versions of the story. The themes of infection and

contagion in the novel are emphasised in this film by adding a plot component in which Dracula's arrival by ship allows a swarm of rats to invade the port (now a German town rather than Whitby) and cause a decimating plague.

The first American vampire film was *London After Midnight* (1927, also known as *The Hypnotist* and remade in 1935 as *Mark of the Vampire*) directed by Tod Browning and starring Lon Chaney senior. The visual appearance which we now associate with Dracula begins to be evident in this film though it was not an adaptation of Stoker's text. Chaney wore a cloak over top hat and tails, had long sharp teeth and used painful steel hoops in his eyelids to open his eyes out into large monstrous circles. The comparatively well-known *Dracula* (1931) was also directed by Tod Browning and used aspects both of Stoker's novel and Hamilton Deane's (1924) British and John Balderston's (1927) American theatre adaptations, which were hugely popular in the 1920s and continued to be performed for decades afterward. The 1931 film's dependence on interior settings and the static performance by Bela Lugosi as a charming and attractive Dracula in an evening suit have become an enduring image for the character, but Lugosi's characterisation derived from decisions made for easier staging of the story in the theatre, rather than on the novel's emphases.

Lugosi was cast in the film because he had played Dracula first in the Broadway stage version by Balderston. Stage versions of the novel needed to have Dracula on stage in drawing-room settings, rather than appearing rarely and in a wide range of outside locations as in the novel. The need to turn *Dracula* into a melodramatic tale of mystery taking place indoors was the reason for the costuming of Dracula in evening dress and opera cloak, making him look like the sinister hypnotists, seducers and evil aristocrats of the Victorian popular theatre. Stage

machinery like trick coffins, trapdoors and smoke effects used in the play also link to the cinematic interest in spectacle and trick effects which have been routinely used in filmed versions. The high-collared cape which we now recognise as a hallmark of the Dracula character was first used in the stage versions. Its function was to hide the back of the actor's head as he escaped through concealed panels in the set to disappear from the stage, while the other actors were left holding his suddenly empty cloak. Film and TV versions of *Dracula* are not simply based on the text of Stoker's novel, but also on the theatrical adaptations of the novel at the end of the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth century. Stoker managed the Lyceum Theatre from 1878-98, working for and with the actor-manager Henry Irving. It is thought that Irving (who was famous for his mesmeric playing of sinister characters like Mephistopheles) was an inspiration for Dracula himself: he was domineering, arrogant, selfish, solemn, and financially extravagant.¹⁷

The first Hammer film *Dracula* (*Horror of Dracula* in the USA) was released in 1958, a British production directed by Terence Fisher and starring Christopher Lee as Dracula and Peter Cushing as Van Helsing. It was shot in a garish Technicolor, at a time when British films were still mainly in black and white, and the Hammer trademarks of copious bright blood, voluptuous maidens, and Lee's portrayal of Dracula as a charismatic and urbane figure were consistently used in a series of six Hammer Dracula films. The series culminated in the 1973 *Satanic Rites of Dracula* in which the Count appeared as a reclusive business magnate in contemporary settings. It was at this point that Lee quit the role, feeling that the consistency and seriousness he had brought to the part had been compromised. Meanwhile in 1970 *Count Dracula* directed by Jesus Franco and starring Christopher Lee presented a faithful version of the novel, but due to lack of finance (it was a co-production using

funds from Spain, West Germany and Italy) was felt to fail to do justice to its aims, though Lee as Dracula had a visual look much closer to Stoker's description than other film versions. *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (1979) directed by Werner Herzog and starring Klaus Kinski, is based on some of the visual and plot hallmarks of Murnau's version (1922), especially in the appearance of Dracula himself, and also attempts to tell the same basic story as Stoker's novel. On the other hand, the adaptation directed by John Badham (1979) was an American film based not on the novel but on the Deane and Balderston plays, starring Frank Langella who had played Dracula in an acclaimed 1977 Broadway version of *Dracula*.

In the 1970s as censorship was softened in Britain and the USA and the commercial possibilities of films treating sexuality directly became evident, films featuring Dracula and vampires in general exploited the erotic potential of the myth to feature nudity and lesbianism (for example *The Vampire Lovers* [1970]). It was in 1977 that James Hart read Stoker's novel, and was struck by its difference from the films he had lately seen based on vampire myths. Hart wrote the script for Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), which claimed in its title to be closely based on the novel. But one of the reasons for the title was that Universal Pictures still owned the copyright on the title *Dracula* used in Tod Browning's film (the same problem affected the title *Frankenstein*, so that *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* also produced by Coppola had to use a similar formulation in its title). Costing over fifty million dollars, the film emphasised a romantic love-story alien to the novel, and makes use of every opportunity for visual illusion, which some have claimed overwhelms the story.¹⁸ The disturbing events in Gothic literature are often described as 'uncanny', and critical discussion of the Gothic often refers to Freud's essay 'The Uncanny', where he remarks that, in German at least, the term 'uncanny' ('unheimlich') contains

the two contradictory senses of familiar and unfamiliar.¹⁹ In other words, everything is potentially double, ambiguous, ambivalent; both good and evil, attractive and repulsive, true and false. Cinema spectatorship has been described in terms of a disavowal within this (I believe this, even though I know it is not true) - just like the mode of readership in Gothic fiction, where the reader delights in the illusion while recognising it *as* an illusion.²⁰ The visual style of Dracula films connects theatrical illusion, the techniques of Gothic literary writing, and the mode of spectatorship developed in cinema.

Appropriately then, the key moment in Coppola's film - when Mina begins to be fascinated with Dracula as well as afraid of him, and recognises him as somehow familiar though she has never met him before - occurs at a cinematograph show where early films (striptease; an arriving train) are being projected to an audience entirely composed of men. Ken Gelder has pointed out that Coppola's film aligns the pleasures of filmgoing with the pleasures of this version of the Dracula story:

We see a 'peep-show' film, with a naked woman walking towards the camera. Even at such an early point in its history, in this account, film is thus an erotic medium which splits the audience in terms of gender: while the women are 'carried away', men are positioned voyeuristically. ... This is consistent with the film's rewriting of the novel, which among other things situates almost everything that happens under the umbrella of the Hollywood romance genre - drawing romance and the experience of (going to) the cinema together. Dracula, in Coppola's film, is a romantic and 'naturally' cinematic hero who sweeps Mina off her feet: after just a little while, she simply cannot say no to him.²¹

The film returns to late Victorian London and the cinematograph to ground its historical setting and to mark its own self-consciousness as an adaptation of a nineteenth century English novel and as part of the cinematic tradition of such adaptations. It returns to a well-worn love-story structure to secure an identification with Dracula and Mina (as the romantic couple) rather than with Harker (the 'hero' of the novel). This notion of a return to the birth of cinema, coupled with the use of modern romance conventions, shows on one hand that desire for origins I have discussed above in relation to the written texts of *Dracula*, on the other the extent to which the novel's story has been transformed in becoming popular cinema.²²

There have been numerous television versions of *Dracula*. In 1957 a TV version of *Dracula* was made as part of the Matinee Theater series on the American NBC network. It was apparently based on the novel rather than the theatrical version, and starred John Carradine as Dracula. However, since it was live and recording was then both expensive and rare, no copies of this production now survive. A TV version of the novel was made in Britain by Thames Television in 1969 in the anthology series of nineteenth century Gothic fiction adaptations titled 'Playhouse: Mystery and Imagination'. It starred Denholm Eliot as Dracula, and some significant alterations were made to the story, notably an insane Jonathan Harker (Corin Redgrave) in an asylum taking on aspects of the Renfield role from the novel. A Canadian *Dracula* (1973) in the Purple Playhouse series was close to Stoker's novel, while a year later another US TV version, *Dracula* directed by Dan Curtis, cast Jack Palance as Dracula and was the first screen version to present him as a romantic figure, seeking the reincarnation of his long-lost lover (this theme was later used in Coppola's film, and was thus not an original approach as the publicity for *Bram Stoker's Dracula* claimed).

Some of the same dashing romantic quality in *Dracula* can be seen in the British BBC TV adaptation *Count Dracula* (1977), which cast Louis Jourdan as Dracula, but in other respects the version is very closely based on the incidents and characterisations of the novel and gained considerable critical acclaim and a large audience. In contrast to many literary adaptations of the time however, the 155-minute production used state-of-the-art film and video effects to present the story as hallucinatory and nightmarish rather than static and naturalistic. In 1979, ABC television in the USA presented a made-for-TV movie version of Stoker's novel called *The Vampyre*, co-written by Stephen Bochco, better known in recent years for series such as *Hill Street Blues*, *LA Law* and *NYPD Blue*. Vampire stories and original plays based more loosely on the Dracula character abound, and have often featured in anthologies of single plays like *Late Night Horror* (GB 1968). In Britain in 1992, a television serial written by Martin Hoyle was produced, called *Vampyre: A Soap Opera*, directed by Nigel Finch, and the presence of Dracula in TV genres other than literary adaptation can be seen in, for example, the characters of The Count in the long-running Children's Television Workshop series *Sesame Street* (where the Lugosi-like muppet obsessively counts things), and in the British Thames Television-Cosgrove Hall animated series *Count Duckula* (1988), where the character is a Daffy Duck-like animal who also sports the cape made famous by Lugosi some sixty years before.

There is a reciprocal relationship between the many film and television versions of the Dracula story and the currency of Dracula and vampire myths in other forms of popular culture. The Romanian Tourist Board offers visitors tours of 'Dracula's castle' and Transylvania, even though Stoker never visited Eastern Europe and gathered his information in the Reading Room of the British Museum in London

from travel books and accounts of Balkan folklore. Whitby in Yorkshire, where Stoker stayed and where in the novel Dracula's ship arrives in Britain, hosts The Dracula Experience involving tours of the locations associated with Stoker's visit there and of the places featured in the text. At an uncommercial level, the Vampyre Association is a group of British devotees of Dracula and vampire fiction, people who often costume themselves in the contemporary Gothic dress code and are an organised part of a broader interest group or subculture. Some of its female members were interviewed on *The South Bank Show's* 'Dracula Special' (London Weekend TV 1993), and their comments suggest that, for some women viewers and readers at least, Dracula is a fantasy figure through whom they can enjoy romance, eroticism, exoticism, and role-playing, features which are perceived to be lacking in everyday life. 'What vampires offer is sex, death, and fancy costumes and who could ask for more', one member of the society commented. The scheduling of this TV documentary at the point of the UK release for *Bram Stoker's Dracula* is not only an effect of public relations activity by the film's distributors, but is also an acknowledgement that film versions of *Dracula* must be seen in the context of a public awareness and interest in vampires which has existed for more than a century.

Today the Dracula myth offers an appealing mixture of nostalgia, eroticism, and a sense of literary seriousness not generally available in contemporary popular culture. As studies of other subcultural groups have shown, the feeling of community, shared knowledge and insider status offered by the Vampyre Society is not simply a defensive reaction to contemporary culture but a powerful way of negotiating a relationship with it and dealing with its contradictions.²³ Another member of the Vampyre Society explained that vampires 'are erotic but in a sort of romantic sort of way. It's not like the cheap sort of sex that gets sold these days - it's

more romantic, more Victorian'. To some women, the vampire myth offers licensed eroticism while holding at bay the contemporary commodification of sexuality. The injunction to define oneself through sexual practices and identities is paradoxically refused via a Victorian heritage which seems romantic and authentic, but was at the time closely related to pornographic writing and the fears and pleasures of sexual excess.²⁴

It is easy to argue that the novel, film and TV versions of *Dracula* and other Gothic novels represent anxieties about gender and sexuality. Not only is sexuality itself both pleasurable and threatening in Gothic fiction, but so too is the fear tied up with it. As Gelder remarks, *Dracula's* concern with danger to the women characters is never explained in sexual terms; 'there is so much to say about sexual motivation in *Dracula* precisely because the novel's own analysts have nothing to say about it whatsoever.'²⁵ Part of the myth's appeal to female members of the Vampyre Society comes from the opening up of this subtext about feminine sexuality. As one of them explained in the LWT documentary, 'Mina and Lucy to start off with didn't have much personality at all until they turned into vampires, and then they became exciting and sexual and absolutely fantastic.' In the late twentieth century, a taste for the Gothic, and for *Dracula* in particular, is very much undead.

Notes

- 1 Victor Sage (ed.), *The Gothick Novel: A Casebook* (London, Macmillan, 1990). Sage's introduction (pp. 8-28) gives a brief but rich overview of the eighteenth century Gothic and its nineteenth century legacy.
- 2 Sage (ed.), *The Gothick Novel*, p. 22.

- 3 Anonymous *Athenaeum* review of *Dracula*, 26 June 1897, reprinted in B. Stoker, *Dracula*, Norton Critical Editions, ed. A. Auerbach & D. Skal (New York, Norton, 1997), p. 364.
- 4 This issue is discussed in relation to the character of Mina in particular in J. Wicke, 'Vampiric typewriting: *Dracula* and its media', *English Literary History*, 59 (1992), pp. 467-93.
- 5 Anonymous *Daily Mail* review of *Dracula*, 1 June 1897, reprinted in Stoker *Dracula*, ed. Auerbach and Skal, p. 363.
- 6 See for example R. Dyer, 'Dracula and Desire', *Sight and Sound*, 3:1 (1993), pp. 8-12, who argues that the film, like a satiated Dracula, is 'engorged' with too much allusion.
- 7 For a useful selection of influential critical readings of *Dracula* see M. Carter, *Dracula: The Novel and the Critics* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1988).
- 8 B. Stoker, *Dracula*, Oxford World's Classics, ed. A. N. Wilson (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1983).
- 9 On contemporary relationships between high and popular culture, see H. Hawkins, *Classics and Trash: Traditions and Taboos in High Literature and Popular Modern Genres* (Hemel Hempstead, Harvester, 1990).
- 10 Stoker, *Dracula*, ed. Auerbach and Skal, p. 326.
- 11 On issues of ambiguity and interpretation in Gothic literature, see E. Kossofsky Sedgewick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (London, Methuen, 1986).
- 12 For the sources of Stoker's novel, see C. Leatherdale, *The Origins of Dracula: The Background to Stoker's Gothic Masterpiece* (London, Kimber, 1987).
- 13 F. Saberhagen and J. Hart, *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (London, Pan, 1992).

- 14 *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, Columbia Tristar videotape, 1993.
- 15 For a fascinating and detailed account of the evolution of the Dracula story from literature to theatre, film and other media, see D. Skal, *Hollywood Gothic: The Tangled Web of Dracula from Novel to Stage to Screen* (New York, Norton, 1990).
- 16 K. Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*, Popular Fictions Series (London, Routledge, 1994), p. 86.
- 17 On Stoker's relationship with Irving, see B. Belford, *Bram Stoker: A Biography of the Author of Dracula* (New York, Knopf, 1996).
- 18 The strengths and weaknesses of the film are briefly catalogued in A. Silver and J. Ursini, *The Vampire Film: From Nosferatu to Bram Stoker's Dracula*, 2nd edn, (New York, Proscenium, 1994), pp. 155-8.
- 19 S. Freud 'The Uncanny', *Art and Literature*, Pelican Freud Library, vol.14, (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1987). For an account of psychoanalytic approaches to Gothic literature, see Gelder *Reading the Vampire*, ch. 3.
- 20 The classic statement of this critical approach is C. Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', *Screen*, 16:2 (1975), pp. 14-76.
- 21 Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*, pp. 89-90.
- 22 I have discussed the reflexivity of *Bram Stoker's Dracula* in relation to postmodernism in J. Bignell, 'Dracula Goes to the Movies: Cinematic Spectacle and Gothic Literature', in D. Sipièrè (ed.), *Dracula: Insemination-Dissemination*, Collection STERNE, (Amiens, University of Picardie Press, 1996), pp. 133-43, and in the context of recent American cinema in J. Bignell, 'Spectacle and the Postmodern in Contemporary American Cinema', *La Licorne*, 36 (1996), pp. 163-80.

- 23 On vampire fan culture, see N. Dresser, *American Vampires: Fans, Victims and Practitioners* (New York, Vintage, 1990).
- 24 On the relationship between *Dracula* and Victorian pornographic writing, see V. Sage 'Dracula and the Victorian codes of pornography' in Sipièrè (ed.), *Dracula: Insemination-Dissemination*, pp. 31-47.
- 25 Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*, p. 67.