
Coppola's Luminous Shadows: *Bram Stoker's Dracula*

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Dracula, that master of masks, can be read as the counterpart to the Victorian society that judges people by appearances. They both belong to the realm of shadows in so far as what they show is but deception, a shadow that seems to be the reality but that is in fact cast on a wall, a modern version of Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*. Dracula rules over the world of representation, be it one of images or tales; he can only live if people believe in him and if light is not thrown on the illusion he has created. Victorian society is trickier: it is the kingdom of light, for it is the time when electric light was invented, a technological era in which appearances are not circumscribed by darkness but are masters of the day. It is precisely when the light is on that shadows can be cast and illusions can appear. Dracula's ability to change appearances and play with artificiality (electric light and moving images) enhances the illusions created by his contemporaries in the late 19th Century.

Through the supernatural atmosphere of his 1992 film *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, Francis Ford Coppola thus underlines the deep links between cinema and a society dominated by both science and illusion. And because cinema is both a diegetic and extra-diegetic actor, the

film conveys a criticism of the Victorian society whilst also presenting itself as a tribute to cinema, to art and to fantasy.¹ Indeed, Coppola's various filmic and artistic techniques and references to the history of cinema pay homage to 'art for art's sake', the mantra associated with the Aesthetic Movement in 19th Century Britain, and which "shocked the Victorian establishment by challenging traditional values, foregrounding sensuality and promoting artistic, sexual and political experimentation"² – and with, among others, Oscar Wilde.

Indeed, the century saw many rapid and strong changes that transformed British society. It was a time both of technological and scientific discoveries (in medicine, transportation, communication, production, picture, etc.) and of constraints that imprisoned individuals in certain roles and led people to internalize their feelings and identities. It is the conjunction of these elements that partly explains the birth of new art movements, and it is late in this period that, among others, Bram Stoker wrote *Dracula* (1897). Thus the film takes an ambiguous approach towards the Victorian era, criticizing the constraints it put on people (moral, scientific, etc.), and at the same time, making a visually enticing recreation of the period shows. The film therefore holds a fragile equilibrium between contradictory forces, creating a gothic-fantastic atmosphere where the supernatural and the rational collide.

Art for Art's Sake

The film is stylised in the manner of a number of artistic trends of the period. The medieval, biblical and romantic scenes all seemingly refer to the work of Pre-Raphaelite painters, while Dracula is a dandy in some ways reminiscent of Oscar Wilde.³ The seduction scene between Mina and Dracula is strongly reminiscent, in its use of colours, themes, and *mise-en-scène*, of the work of some of the Pre-Raphaelites, with Lucy's bright red hair inevitably reminding us of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. In the same way, the scenes in the garden can be seen as a reference to Arthur Hughes's *April Love*, and the peacock whose feather hides the kiss between Mina and Harker appears to be a reference to Whistler's *Peacock Room*. The scene where Elisabeta lies dead on the floor of the church makes a direct allusion to Millais's *Ophelia*.

Elisabeta's death is also Ophelia-like and the Shakespearean allusion is one of many in the film: when Dracula first meets Mina, a man appears carrying a board advertising John Irving as Hamlet at the Lyceum theatre. Of course, Coppola is here paying tribute not only to Bram Stoker but also to the theatre, to Shakespeare and to actors; and the tribute goes as far as filming some scenes as if they have come from Shakespeare's plays. For instance, the campfire scene, with the three female vampires trying to take possession of Mina's spirit and

¹ See Francis Ford Coppola and James V. Hart, *Bram Stoker's Dracula: The Film and the Legend*, New York: Newmarket Press, 1992.

² Carolyn Burdett, 'Aestheticism and decadence', British Library, *Discovering Literature: Romantics & Victorians, Fin de siècle*, 15 March 2014, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/aestheticism-and-decadence>, accessed 30 September 2018.

³ Jim Steinmeyer, *Who Was Dracula? : Bram Stoker's Trail of Blood*, New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2013.

induce her seduction of Van Helsing is reminiscent of *Macbeth* (and its supernatural atmosphere). When Dracula tells Harker that “*the victories of [his] great race are but a tale to be told*”, he is referencing Macbeth's final soliloquy.⁴ Moreover, the décor and lighting of the scenes between Mina and Dracula, or Dracula and Harker, are highly ‘dramatic’. The many pictorial and theatrical references enable Coppola to offer the audience a visual spectacle rich in hybridity.

Coppola's *Dracula* also pays tribute to the art of film by giving a brief history of the cinema through the deployment of the different techniques the film and photographic industry has invented over the years. The first shots of London recall the fixed images of tourist sites created by the Victorian photographic apparatus, and photography is an important element in the film, linking the people and places and enabling the story to develop as well as exposing the opposition between light and shade (the photos of Mina and Harker). But the director not only shows the devices the cinema has created suggest supernatural and magic atmospheres, he also uses them in their diversity: the *camera obscura*, the magic lantern, the phantasmagoria, the shadow theatre (all of them playing with lights, sometimes with mirrors and shadows), and the tricks and special effects of illusionists and conjurers.

The film also insists on the fact that the Victorian era was a time of invention which enabled cinema to become what it is today, for instance thanks to the invention of the apparatus for capturing and reconstituting sounds such as the gramophone and the phonograph (for example those belonging to Dr Seward and to Lucy). All these are present in Dracula's castle as well as in the movie theatre to which Dracula takes Mina, where these devices give birth to the first camera presented to us as it films the characters on the street, and as the film extracts are shown (the Lumiere brothers' *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (Fr, 1895), and Méliès' *The Devil's Castle* and *The Vanishing Lady* (both Fr, 1896). Thus, the Victorian era is celebrated for the artistic inventions to which it gave birth, and the film is a way of enjoying its play with cinematic conventions as well the pleasure to be had from being a spectator at the very beginnings of the art of film.⁵

Coppola also pays tribute to the gothic-fantastic genre to which the story of Dracula belongs.⁶ The neo-gothic architecture of the film was born in the Victorian era at the time of the Gothic Revival movement. The *mise-en-scène* involves mist, *chiaroscuro*, nocturnal darkness, basic or sophisticated special effects (doors opening mysteriously, Dracula flying in the air, Dracula's metamorphoses), archetypal colours (blue for the magic energy field, red for sexuality, murder and evil, black for the devil), and plays on the mysteries of light and

⁴ For analysis of the film's references to Shakespeare, see Adrian Streete, ‘Ethics and the Undead: Reading Shakespearean (Mis) appropriation in Francis Ford Coppola's *Dracula*’, in Alexa Huang and Elizabeth Rivlin, eds., *Elizabethan Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 59–72.

⁵ See Sigrid Anderson Cordell, ‘Sex, Terror, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: Coppola's Reinvention of Film History’, *Neo-Victorian Studies*, vol. 6 no. 1, 2013, pp. 1–21.

⁶ On Dracula and the Gothic, see Fred Botting, *Gothic*, London: Routledge, 1997.

shadow. Moreover, the references to previous Dracula films create an uncanny atmosphere, as for example the scene when Dracula rises from his coffin as straight as a pike, a direct reference to Murnau's *Nosferatu* (Germany, 1922).⁷ Coppola's *Dracula* benefits from what other productions brought to the character of the vampire, for if *Nosferatu* is a devilish and repulsive figure, the convention of the more attractive Dracula first appeared in 1931 when Bela Lugosi played the part in the Tod Browning's film; in Terence Fisher's *The Curse of Frankenstein* (UK, 1957), Christopher Lee confirmed the trend.

Coppola's uncanny, phantasmagorical, and mesmerizing atmosphere is also inspired by Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast* (France, 1945–1946); indeed, Dracula's castle looks like the Beast's, with its statues and strange candlesticks.⁸ Other cinematic references may be helpful here: when Lucy is being exorcised, a parallel can be drawn with Regan in William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (USA, 1974), and the phosphorescent fog is that of John Carpenter's *Fog* (USA, 1979). On a more humorous note, and perhaps in a tribute to Coppola's old friend George Lucas, the old and wrinkled face of Dracula shrouded in a black hood, appearing out of the darkness, is like that of the Emperor in George Lucas's *Star Wars* (the first trilogy, 1977–1983). Where music is concerned, we should not forget the atmospheric contribution by Wojciech Kilar – who also wrote the music for Grimault's *The King and the Mockingbird* (France, 1980), based on the fairy-tale by Hans Christian Andersen – or, at another angle, the part of Renfield, the insect-eating lunatic, played by musician/actor Tom Waits.

Class Conflict

The artistic references in the film appear to evince a strong binary opposition between the world of the aristocracy, on the one hand, and the bourgeoisie on the other. The aristocracy is represented by Dracula himself, on the face of it a well-mannered prince, proud of his ancestors and his traditions, and driven by a strong sense of honour. (And of course, he also embodies idleness and seduction.)⁹ That is why on a visual level he is fascinating, and that is also why his clothes, his strange beauty, and his behaviour are so alluring. Since in his world he is used to being obeyed, he goes on commanding (Mina to see him, Lucy to obey him and become a vampire). His ascendancy over the world is represented by his far-seeing eyes and by the shadows covering his territories and surrounding those over which he rules. However, Dracula exerts a devilish hold but also embodies an aristocratic power which is fading. It is

⁷ See Waltje Jörg, 'Filming *Dracula*: Vampires, Genre, and Cinematography', *Journal of Dracula Studies*, no. 2 2000, pp. 24–33.

⁸ For the references to Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast*, see Lindsey Scott, 'Crossing Oceans of Time: Stoker, Coppola and the 'New Vampire' Film', in Sam George and Bill Hughes, eds., *Open Graves, Open Minds: Representations of Vampires and The Undead From The Enlightenment To The Present Day*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013, and Jean Marigny, 'Dracula: Tradition and Postmodernism in Stoker's Novel and Coppola's Film', in John S. Bak, ed., *Post/modern Dracula: From Victorian Themes to Postmodern Praxis*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007.

⁹ See Carrol Fry and John Robert Craig, 'Unfit for Earth, Undoomed for Heaven: The Genesis of Coppola's Byronic *Dracula*', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 30 no. 4, 2002, pp. 271-278.

not surprising, therefore, that even if Transylvania is in his grip, his castle is falling into ruin. There is no life in a building which seems to be partly alive only at night, except on the day Dracula leaves for Europe, which could perhaps herald some kind of rebirth.

Dracula's quest for Mina is in a certain sense a case of the aristocracy looking for an alliance with the bourgeoisie. To Dracula, she is the late aristocratic Elisabeta, but in England he introduces himself as 'Prince Vlad' and she is simply Mina Murray. This shift (from old customs and alliances to new ones) underlines how bourgeoisie has become a means for the aristocracy to survive. This opposition can also be found in the scene taking place in Dracula's castle when Harker's photo of Mina visually separates him from Dracula. They compete to rule both over Mina's heart and the modern world. Mina can thus be seen as the only hope of a union between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. Indeed, Dracula is dying because so too is the aristocracy. Only shadows and murmurs inhabit the castle, those of the female ghouls obeying Dracula, luring men to their destruction – part Sirens, part Gorgons.

They tell the audience that modern civilisation has not yet reached the castle and that it is still an ancient place whence noblemen rule the world; unreachable, they are also mysterious and unknown. Technological progress and science have either given access to or destroyed their territories. When Dracula dies, his castle really becomes a mausoleum. Tales, legends and superstitions feed on the unknown and give the aristocracy a power which seems magic because it is eternal and devilish. In London, Lucy belongs to this dying aristocracy, that is why she is bound to die, and she dies listening to the song of the arising bourgeoisie (the gramophone) embodied by Mina. Lucy is the only heir of her family, and she will not have the time to give birth to a new generation – she is the victim of Zeus/Dracula who turns into rain to seduce her and inseminate her with death. Mina is also contaminated but she will survive for she is not an aristocrat.

Cinema calls on imagination, myths and tales which existed before its birth to transmit stories about the world and how the world works.¹⁰ The visual code Coppola uses is well-known: the red colour in which Lucy dresses represents aroused sexuality, and the copulation scene between Lucy and the beast is polysemous: it is reminiscent of Fuseli's *The Nightmare* (1781) with the lecherous goblin on a sleeping young woman, but it can also remind one of Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* telling the story of a curse on the last heir of a lineage (1901). These references also hint at how the supernatural can be explained in more down-to-earth ways: sexual frustration and repression¹¹ as explained by psychoanalysis, on the one hand, and basic human instincts on the other. Moreover, the criticism of a frustrating Victorian society leading individuals to become others can be seen as a reference to Jack the Ripper and his bestial murders of prostitutes. There again, cinema draws from culture to show

¹⁰ On vampires and folklore, see Radu Florescu and Raymond T. McNally, *In Search of Dracula: The History of Dracula and Vampires*, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, rev. ed., 1994.

¹¹ See Christopher McGunnigle, 'My Own Vampire: The Metamorphosis of the Queer Monster in Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*', *Gothic Studies*, vol. 7 no. 2, November 2005, pp. 172–184.

on the screen what the audience thought was only in their imagination. Eventually, this scene can also be a reference to pious images describing the devil's deeds.

Lucy is the libertine/dissolute aristocracy that does not follow the austere principles of the era. Mina, for her part, represents the new bourgeoisie and also the women who, in the Victorian period, did not want to be identified with their gender role in society: she is educated and a writer. Mina has the power of the words, but her margin of individual freedom is limited by her social class and by what the society at the time could accept. It is no surprise, then, that Mina finds a copy of *The Arabian Nights* in Lucy's study, a book which is important for two reasons: both because the sexual acts it describes belong to what must not be shown or alluded to in Victorian society, and contrariwise because the book is thus the place where fantasy can be unleashed. The transition from novel to cinema is then obvious: the cinema has taken over the role of the written word, and, moreover, it has also brought fantasy and dreams much closer to the real than ever before (is the copulation scene between Lucy and the beast real or does it belong to the realm of fantasy?).

The aristocracy is at risk when Lucy is shown not being a paragon of virtue and respectability, when she cannot adequately embody the steadiness of earnest and respectable Victorian society. Because Lucy is a playful and innocent seductress who wears eccentric and provocative clothing, who makes the most of the leisure society in which she was born (listening to the gramophone), denying at the same time an era in which austerity and profitability are key, she thus embodies a dying world. So does the party scene taking place at Lucy's in which the black veil symbolizing Dracula swallows the different characters to eventually close on the old and wrinkled face of the prince/vampire. This reference to the Emperor in *Star Wars* leads us towards the dark side which is present in Lucy and in each of the characters. The same effect occurs when Harker, on his way to Dracula's castle, reads a letter from Dracula at nightfall – he turns into a shadow on to which falls a ray of light. Harker is thus characterised by a dual personality: he follows rational and moral standards on the one hand, and on the other he succumbs to the fundamental pleasures of the flesh.

Herein lies the fiction's criticism of Victorian society: by compelling people to pretend to be who they are not, it leads them to become even more dangerous. For instance, it is when Lucy and then Mina do not openly correspond to what is expected of Victorian women that society – in the persons of Dr Seward and Van Helsing – decides they need to be cured or to be excluded. Lucy cannot really be sexually free, she has to get married and provide her noble family with an heir. It is because she plays the seductress that she dies, and only then can she unleash her drives. When Lucy lies in her glass coffin, clothed in her white wedding dress, she looks like a parody of a pure and immaculate Snow-White waiting for her Prince Charming to come and wake her with a kiss. But here the kiss of the prince has turned her into a vampire, and the reversal of the fairy tale is not trivial: it asserts that outward appearance does not reflect the true nature of the being. And once dead, in her white dress, she also becomes Andersen's Snow Queen, the queen who bewitches and enslaves young men thanks to a broken piece of mirror. Victorian society wants its members to look virtuous, but even the

most heinous murderers can manage to look virtuous and so escape justice. Van Helsing, for example, is a professor, a doctor, a scientist, a philosopher, and a man of faith, he is to be trusted and he is supposed to be protective. Yet as soon as he no longer has to keep up appearances, he is authoritarian, violent, and a sexual predator.

At the same time this society condemns those who do not seem to conform, notably Lucy and the young American. Only those who refuse to follow the Victorian social rules of conduct die: Lucy because she plays the vamp, Dracula who keeps changing appearances, and Quincey who remains himself never pretending to be who he is not. It is no coincidence that Quincey is the archetypal Texan. Plainspoken and someone who does not hide his feelings, he has not been moulded by the English society: his appurtenances are meaningful – he carries a hunting knife and gun in a new world where nature is not yet totally dominated by technology. He embodies the Rousseau-esque state of nature as opposed to Victorian civilisation. In this sense, the only characters fit to survive in this industrial era are the representatives of the rising bourgeoisie: Harker, the young estate agent whose white hair represents his acquired respectability and self-control; Dr. Seward, who embodies modernity and the advanced scientific era; and Van Helsing and the priest – both roles played by Anthony Hopkins, who is also the main narrator – who is the link between the past and the present, mediating between an era in which religion was all-powerful and an era in which science has become so.

He embodies the power of the dark side, the power that rules behind the rulers, as reflected by his lustful behaviour towards Mina and his murderous madness towards Dracula. His madness also reminds one of Jack the Ripper, and one wonders whether Van Helsing is not an allusion to the notorious Whitechapel killer since, after all, his only victims are female. Dracula, Lucy and Lord Arthur Holmwood are doomed because they are the last of their kind: Lord Arthur has no noble wife to give him heirs; Dracula is the last representative of nobility, but his time has come to an end as he himself announces during Harker's first meal in the castle: *"blood is too precious a thing in these times; the warlike days are over; the victories of my great race are but a tale to be told; I am the last of my kind."* This overarching opposition between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie can also be found in the film's contrasts between the Victorian spirit – rational, scientific, and materialistic – and the medieval spirit in which fantasy, tales and traditions are embedded.

A Spiritual Story

Dracula is a story dealing with spirits in the full meaning of the word (that is both supernatural beings, and minds – scientific, religious, etc.). It is the story of the struggle between different spirits, and it shows the victory of reason over fantasy: the first place the camera visits in London is the lunatic asylum, where imagination is locked up and controlled by rationality. The film tells the story of this fight as symbolized in the figure of Dracula. This is also the confrontation between a scientific era of technological revolutions and a pre-industrial era, between the rising bourgeoisie represented by Harker and the archaic religious and aristocratic world of Dracula. It tells of the handing over of power, the change from one

civilisation to another and it is shown by two scenes linked by the 'eye of the peacock feather eye – the scene with Mina and Harker in Lucy's garden, and that of Harker's journey on the train. This trip is already a brief summary of the political and economic history of Great Britain since the railway can be seen as the symbol of the British industrial power, spreading most of the civilized and colonized world and enabling access to the remotest and least industrialised part of Eastern Europe.

The tunnel symbolizes the frontier between the civilized, rationalistic and scientific world of Western Europe, and especially the all-powerful Britain, and a world so far untouched by the industrial revolution and scientific knowledge, a place still under the power of the unknown and of superstition. Moreover, this scene is introduced by another in which Mina leads Harker to a bower in the garden so as to kiss him unnoticed. In this scene, their kiss is hidden by the dim bower and by the peacock feather which also symbolizes the veil with which Victorian society covers over matters related to sexuality. The camera here plays the role of Victorian censorship. The peacock feather is the fan protecting decency, but the peacock also symbolizes sins. Then the 'eye' of the peacock feather is the link with the following scene as it turns into the mouth of the tunnel and the cry of the peacock turns into the whistling of the steam locomotive. Later serving also as a link to Dracula's blue eye, the 'eye' of the feather also serves as a transition between two worlds and of two ways of looking at the world: Dracula's blue eye is all-seeing, for there is nothing to hide, the tunnel marks a symbolic passage between cultures and moralities which are different and yet complementary. The image of the locomotive moving forward, over the leaves of Harker's diary, implies continuity: the narrative goes on but now the written work tells a story that crosses boundaries/frontiers, and also symbolizes the entry in the world of fantasy, into a narrative infused with supernatural concerns.

Coppola manipulates the film's spectators and deceive their senses. When the key image of filmic narrative (the train) is superposed on the written narrative (the diary), the audience enters the realm of tales and legends, and suddenly what seemed to be only in their minds (their fear, their hopes, etc.) becomes tangible, and they are invited to believe what they are shown. The narrative starts and ends in the same precise place because the tale always comes back to its birthplace and origins: it dies in order to be born again, just as Dracula does. The film claims Dracula's story to be historically authentic on two occasions: the pre-title sequence goes back to 1492 to recount his story, and then Van Helsing reads a reference book on Dracula. The film narrative and the written narrative are once again superposed and united to give strength and reality to the myth and to the character, blurring the border between story and history.

The film sees the Carpathians as a doomed place where anything can happen, where night is mysterious and dangerous. It is the realm of the supernatural where slatterns can turn into princesses and human beings can turn into werewolves, when evil breaks upon the world. It is the country which has not been reached by light, a land of obscurantism literal and metaphorical. Scientific progress has brought light to England (in Dr Seward's room, the lamp

is used to find Dracula hidden in a dark corner), but it has not reached these remote lands. Thus, right from the start, this country is dominated by shadows: the shadow theatre staging Dracula's armies fighting, Dracula's dragon-shaped helmet (symbol of his lineage), the ascendancy of Islam over the Christian world (a shadow contested by Dracula's red scaly gauntlet). Light and shadows, red and black, shadows of impaled people: it is a phantasmagoria. Coppola uses these techniques to emphasize the darkness and bloodiness of the place and character, creating a phantasmagoric landscape of light and shade, the shadows of the impaled, contrasting reds and blacks. We might recall that the colour red/pink, symbolizing blood and Dracula's power (his armour, his ascendancy over Lucy, and especially the estates he buys in London that he circles with red) was also the colour traditionally used by British cartographers to designate the territories of the worldwide British Empire of the period.

In spite of surface change, those who truly rule keep in the background and themselves never change. Anthony Hopkins plays two such characters in the film: the priest who sends Dracula on a holy war and who damns Elisabeta, and Van Helsing, the philosopher-metaphysician (reason, religion and medicine all embodied in one man) who leads his companions on a crusade against Dracula. Religion, reason and science seem to be cut from the same cloth: from time immemorial convincing orators have managed to impose their vision of the world and led people on crusades against religious, superstitious or moral heresy. If religion backed the secular power of the kings, the new society is backed by science which gets rid of its predecessors by accusing them of scientific and moral heresy. Indeed, when during his lecture on blood Van Helsing claims that "*civilization and syphilization have advanced together*", he insists on the role of science working hand in hand with moral standards, a role that religion used to play alone.

Jack the Ripper once again looms large. He killed prostitutes by night and in dark alleys, becoming a creature of the night and in the process entering urban mythology for well over a century. He is a pendant to Dracula who, though a literary figure, is also a night creature and an important a figure in British culture. This link between the two figures, through the character of Van Helsing who embodies the different aspects of society that constrain human imagination and needs (religious dogma, austere science, a sexual predator and repressor, etc.), makes its own contribution to the supernatural atmosphere induced by the blurring of frontiers between reality and fiction, and by the role played by the opposition between reason and sexual urges. Whereas Jack was never identified, and so in one sense his story has never ended, Dracula must die because he does not conform to the new religious ideology of the bourgeoisie, and because he is the embodiment of fantasy which the normative society and the rational mind fight relentlessly.

Entering Dracula's castle means entering the world of fantasy, as suggested by the circle of blue light Harker which crosses, blue being a colour which regularly indicates fantasy in the film (Dracula's spectacles, for instance). Until Harker reaches the meeting point, he is not betrayed by his senses, but when at night he is left on his own in the middle of nature, he is

first surrounded by the characters and sounds typical of the supernatural narrative, such as wolves and their howling, and vampires nailed with crosses, and then his senses begin to fail him. Once he enters Dracula's castle, he can no longer trust his senses: he walks in the world of fantasy, of illusion, of art – and of cinema. Harker is the mirror image of the spectator: the blue light can then be seen as the blue screen used for tricks and special effects, and also as the screen on which the film is shown. When crossing the threshold of Dracula's castle, Harker crosses the dividing line between the real world and the sphere of tales and myths. When Harker is invited into Dracula's castle, the spectator is invited to come into the world of the artist, believing what they are going to be shown and told, as is the rule with cinema.

The film's play with light and shade focuses the spectator's attention on what they must see, on what they are required to see. A clear parallel is thus drawn between the power of the cinema and the power of Dracula himself: like the film-maker, he is the master of darkness and illumination. In his castle, he controls what people see, deceiving human senses (he never is where Harker expects him to be). Everyday perceptions are no longer trustworthy, because Dracula, and the cinema, are now playing with them. There is also an allusion here to Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*: we should not trust our senses since shadows are not reality but only a distorted vision of it, and cinema, too, may appear to be reality but is in fact only a vision of it. Whereas in Plato human beings would rather believe a lie than the truth, the cinema does not lie about its own nature. In the scenes taking place in Transylvania, the references to legends, myths and oral traditions are underlined to show that cinema was not born out of nothing, but feeds on other artistic forms: it is their heir. Cinema is born of legends – Dracula would not exist without them. Moreover, Stoker's imagination, which had been fed with Irish legends, is present in the film when the scene at Lucy's opens up on a harp, the symbol of Ireland and of its cultural and mythological heritage.

It comes as no surprise that in the castle Dracula's shadow, cast upon a map of London, is used as a transition between the imaginary world of Dracula and that of London in 1897. Until that point, fantasy and reality are clearly divided; they represent two worlds, two spaces which almost never mix except in people's minds. However, when Dracula bends over London, then fantasy enters into reality. In showing newspaper reports of Dracula's coming to London, the film reminds us of the development of the press, and of the reading public, during the 19th Century. In turn, it also reminds us that while newspapers are supposed to convey factual information, they also trade on people's fears. The scene in which Dracula reads about the mysterious events taking place in London symbolizes the intrusion of the imaginary world into the news and into reality. When at the beginning of the scene Dracula seems to be in a film being shot, the film scrolls and shows what the first films made with the first tripod cameras showed: the filming of reality. Yet, in this scene, fantasy intrudes once again into the filming of reality. Coppola reminds us here that this complex fusion of the real and the fantastical is from the very start at the heart of cinema.

This explains why eyes are such an important feature of the film, since they are not only human but also the basic mechanism of representation – the 'eye' of the camera, too. Eyes

are thus at the core of the film, whether they be Dracula's eyes in the sky, the different pairs of spectacles (Renfield's, Dracula's), Mina's binoculars, Dracula's watching Mina and vice versa, and Dracula's determination to make her see what he wishes her to. Dracula leads Mina into the world of cinema – he wants to see the technological wonder of the civilized world, but she first resists by talking about culture and museums. However, she lets herself be charmed and follows him. Yet, after having vainly tried to oppose culture to the imaginary world embodied by Dracula/cinema, she tries to oppose science to it, but she once again fails. The world of fantasy, of the supernatural that science means to kill by rationalizing life, makes fun of science as it uses it for its own sake (science has given birth to cinema and enables it to live on).

Dracula not only leads Mina into his personal playground but he also invites the audience to enter a cinema, thus creating a true *mise-en-abîme* of the situation in which they find themselves as viewers of Coppola's film. Then the wolf creates a panic which enables the fleeing Mina to show the audience of *Dracula* what takes place on the other side of the screen. It is also a device for recounting to us the history of cinema, of tales and the story of Dracula, since the shadow theatre tells the same story we were offered at the beginning of the film. There is once again an allusion to Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, since the image appearing on the wall/screen is not real, but indeed a screen between reality and fantasy, a border which can be crossed by intermediate figures such as Dracula. Mina cannot fight Dracula for he is as real as the world surrounding her, a figure who moves between the worlds of 'nature' and of 'culture'. He knows how to make the most of both worlds: he may be a very worldly and sophisticated fellow, yet he can cross over into the world of animals to talk to wolves.

He is excessive in a world of civilisation which prefers to suppress or eliminate that which it cannot control (Dr. Seward's asylum is symbolic here). The seduction scenes between Dracula and Mina represent the reconciliation between the beings and their fantasy world, their deeper selves and their nature. When Dracula declares that "*Absinthe is the aphrodisiac of the self; the green fairy who lives in the absinthe wants your soul, but you are safe with me*", the bottom of the glass turns into the eye of the camera, and Mina's memories/visions appear on the screen. Indeed, it is alcohol that enables Mina to free her imagination, which leads her to cross the borders of propriety to speak her thoughts, to give birth to a tale – that of Dracula and Elisabeta, the eye of the camera at the bottom of the glass drawing a parallel between the intoxications provided by both alcohol and cinema. This scene can also be read as suggesting the cathartic effect of art on human beings, enabling them to free themselves from the limitations of frustration and propriety.

Thus it is obvious why Mina, when she meets Dracula, does not want to go to the cinema and cannot accept it as a form of culture: in a society which denies and kills fantasy, she can only talk of museums, which in this film symbolize death, history and rationality. They tell about the worldwide powerful Britain, showcasing the treasures brought back from the colonies. In the film, the museum can also symbolize civilisation at its best, as in the references to Madame Curie and to hard science, but here again, science is also seen as the

bringer of death, not life. That is why the film appears at moments to be a science documentary, speeded up to demonstrate the decay of flowers, vegetation and hence of life itself. The scientific side of the film is also present when Renfield's glasses are used as microscopes to study insects. With its account of the nutritive elements, the film then turns into a kind of instructional text which teaches the viewers that to stay alive, one has to kill; the less scientific character of all (Renfield) is the one who has got the soundest vision on life – there is always a prey and a hunter. Dracula hunts in order to feed, whereas Van Helsing only hunts to kill.

Thus the blood cells seen through the microscope can be understood as pointing to the deadly effects of some recent diseases on human blood (such as AIDS), but the images also emphasise the 'colder' side of science and medicine, all the more so when Van Helsing performs a risky blood transfusion and associates sexuality with death. Indeed, there is nothing mesmerizing and beautiful in these quasi-scientific scenes of mortality, whereas the kind of death brought about by Dracula – as seen by him, at any rate – is less despairing, and indeed attractive. When Mina asks Dracula to "*take [her] away from all this death*", she speaks from the standpoint of a Victorian society which is in a sense death itself since it forbids individuals to accept as natural their bodily needs. The imaginary and fantasy worlds human beings create are in this sense more alive than the society which condemns and even kills them. The only way to flee from this world is through death.

In such a context it is even possible to ask oneself whether Van Helsing is not so much the embodiment of science as the embodiment of the Victorian way of death. Indeed, when he performs an autopsy, he cuts the head and tears out the heart – two core elements of feelings and imagination. Van Helsing's inheritor, Dr Seward, for his part, tries to analyse and rationalise everything, but his frustration with the impossibility of such a task is what leads him to resort to drugs. His need to understand, to inquire, to rationalize, to study and to take drugs draws a parallel between him and another major character of the Victorian era – Sherlock Holmes. The allusion to Conan Doyle is made through the beast-like Dracula in Lucy's garden, perhaps reminiscent of the creature terrorising the moors in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

Van Helsing is a metaphysician-philosopher, and as such he embodies all the research associated with the Victorian era. This also explains why, when he is with Seward, he talks about mesmerism, hypnosis and magnetic fields. These theories go along electrobiology and the myth of Frankenstein.¹² Fantasy warns us that when human beings want to tame nature rather than understand it, they create monsters, as the stories of Frankenstein and Dracula remind us. The new technology of the age can be of a great rational and scientific help, for instance the telegraph (a Victorian invention which enables Dr Seward to get in touch with Van Helsing) or the phonograph (Dr. Seward records his comments on his patients). But the

¹² For background, see Martin Willis and Catherine Wynne, *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006.

machine can also help art – Lucy listens to music on her gramophone, and the narrative is 'written' on Mina's typewriter.

Indeed, the scenes involving the typewriter are of considerable relevance here. The machine was invented at the end of the 19th Century and thanks to it, Mina, the schoolmistress (at a time of important education reforms), can create her diary and correspond with her fiancé, Harker. Lucy blames him for compelling Mina to use this invention just because it is modern, but Mina in fact subverts the original purpose of the typewriter by recording her dreams, hopes and fantasies, creating 'a story'. Mina reminds one in this sense of Mary Shelley – she is learned, and her appearances do not let one suppose she can have such a wild imagination. Indeed, Dracula is the product of her imagination, her dream of a wild passion; and it is through the letters she exchanges with Harker that the story of *Dracula* is being written, the letters symbolizing the process of writing.

The scientific progress represented in the film enhances the importance of the technological inventions born in the Victorian age, thus underlining Britain's global power in this period, but it also shows that imagination is born out of frustration, and that imagination, the supernatural, and fantasy always manage to appear where they are least expected. The Victorian world attempted to conquer ancient worlds whose traditions conflict with the cold rationality mind of the 'new' Britain, exactly the conflict represented by the struggle between the emerging British bourgeoisie and the historic nobility associated with Dracula. Those who embody this older world are doomed to die: Dracula cannot command a reflection in the mirror because he does not belong in this world of cold science and mere reality. The emblematic symbol of the wolf, in its linkage to Dracula, then takes on another meaning: Dracula is the wolf and vice versa: they induce fear, which gives way to superstition, and leads inexorably to the extermination of the monster – that which cannot be identified or known, the aspect of ourselves we cannot see or will not acknowledge.

Dracula may die, but the myth lives on because it is the embodiment of some of our deepest fears. At the same time, thanks in this case to the cinema, he is even more alive than ever; previously he was only a character belonging to the world of oral or literary story-telling. Science gives reality to dreams. Thus, Dracula can die under the spotlights (in the final Christ-like scene), but he has now come back to life again thanks to the power of cinematic narration. As the film comes to a close, eyes are once again the centre of attention in a scene which carries a variety of meanings. Light is cast on Dracula's face, turned towards the sky; he is human again. The scene may perhaps point to the reconciliation societal constraint and human imagination: on the ceiling of the dome, it is not God reaching out his hand towards man, it is Dracula holding Elisabeta's hand, perhaps a sign of human beings making peace with the impulses of their deeper selves. It may also be suggestive of the film camera looking upon the origins of cinema itself. But the scene may also signify the rebirth of human imagination: Dracula, the one who could only live in darkness, that light could destroy so easily, is born again into the light and he no longer needs to hide. As light and darkness are reconciled and resolved, he has become immortal and he is loved.