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Dracula on Film, 1931 – 1959

In her incisive analysis of Dracula (1897, Bram Stoker), Jennifer Wicke argues that the novel 'incessantly displays' and is 'obsessed' with 'technological and cultural modalities' of the period – the telegraph, the phonic records, the Kodak camera, the mass media.[1] So what happens when the entire story becomes enfolded within a technological form? This chapter explores Dracula (1931, Tod Browning, USA), Son of Dracula (1943, Robert Siodmak, USA) and Dracula (1958, Terence Fisher, UK) in order to examine how the silver screen represents the vampire Count and how his character changes with each cinematic resurrection. How is visual storytelling employed to tell a story that has already been explore as a novel, at least two European silent films, and three stage plays?

This exploration is guided by the principles of character formation in playwriting and screenwriting. In Screen Language, Cherry Potter argues that characterisation and story are interdependent. For Potter, characterisation is the visual and verbal information that demonstrates to the audience 'who a character is and what he or she wants and needs', and in addition, that it is the protagonist's wants and needs 'which determine the backbone or structure of the story'.[2] Here, Dracula is a character required to respond to the demands of the medium-specific form: in cinematic adaptations, who is he? Is he the protagonist or antagonist? What does he want and need? How do his desires impact upon the forward progression of the narrative? How are his desires articulated visually? Finally, reflecting across the three case studies, how do the characteristics of the vampire change across the three decades?

Dracula (1931)

> Motion pictures are still in their infancy. For a while it began to look as though they had grown up, when bang! They instantly become infantile again. Little children have two passionate urges – one, to make mud pies and snowmen, and the other to go "boo!" and frighten their playmates. Grown up infants like to do the same things – they wish to create "monsters" to frighten people.[3]
>
> Rob Wagner's Script, 20 February 1932.

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[1] Jennifer Wicke, 'Vampiric Typewriting: Dracula and its Media', ELH: English Literary History, 59.2 (1992): 475-476.

[2] Cherry Potter, Screen Language: From Film Writing to Film-Making (London: Methuen Drama, 2001), p.231.

[3] Quoted in Anthony Slide, Selected Film Criticism, 1931 – 40 (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1982), p.78.

Károly Lajthay's lost Hungarian film *Drakula halála / Dracula's Death* (1921) is currently considered the first cinematic adaptation of Stoker's novel.[4] The more famous, later adaptation is Nosferatu: eine Symphonie des Grauens / Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror (1922, F.W. Murnau, Germany). Five years after Nosferatu, Hollywood began its transition to sound. The process took three and a half years; Dracula appeared three months before the end of the transition, as the first 'talkie' horror film, and inaugurating the American horror book of the 1930s.[5]

The film begins with Renfield, repurposed here as an estate agent travelling to Transylvania to finalise the sale of Carfax Abbey. Renfield's preliminary journey is of little interest; it is not until five minutes into the film that the horror begins. We are suddenly dropped into the dungeon of Castle Dracula. German cinematographer Karl Freund is unleashed from the static staging of Renfield's prologue and is given freedom to explore. The camera position is intimate and personal, our experience unmediated by any diegetic character. The camera comes to rest at a group of coffins. A bony, white hand reaches out, and a bride of Dracula sits up. Her skin is as white as the stars, and her eyes are as black as coal. But we're called away from her, pulled forward mercilessly, against our will. A man stands alone in the deepest, darkest corner of the dungeon. He wears a black cape. His black hair is slicked back. His pale skin casts a luminescent glow. Silently, he gazes at us. At first he's in medium long shot, but we keep moving closer, and now he's in medium close up, still staring, both appalled and thrilled at our intrusion. The spell is broken with a cut to the three brides appearing. A wolf howls and slowly, stiff-backed, Dracula (Bela Lugosi) ascends the stone steps and leave the dungeon.

This scene lacks all narrative motivation. We are not following the experience of Renfield. Instead, this is a purely visual, cinematic experience. We are provided with a dungeon, coffins, three pale women, and a pale man dressed in black. Without a word of dialogue, we know that this is Dracula. The gothic set design invokes fear, while the roaming camera is a moment of dread, moving ever closer to glowering Dracula, as if hypnotised. Moreover, as we look at him, however unwillingly, his own

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[4] Gary D. Rhodes, 'Drakula halála (1921): The Cinema's First Dracula', Horror Studies, 1.1 (2010): 25-48.

[5] Robert Spadoni, Uncanny Bodies: The Coming of the Sound Film and the Origins of the Horror Genre (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), p.2.

look back into the camera lens is significant. Tom Brown has pointed out that 'direct address is often a marker of a character's particular power within the fiction'.[6] Here, Dracula's gaze into the camera lens signals his power and knowledge, unafraid to challenge us. In this sequence the audience lacks all control, and we are drawn to the darkness, despite knowing the consequences. In his classic 1972 article on the Dracula film adaptations, Roy Huss argues that Browning's Dracula is a missed opportunity, 'shackled by the producer's decision to capitalise upon the success of Balderston and Deane's stage adaptation of Bram Stoker's classic novel, rather than to exploit the greater cinematic suggestiveness of the novel itself'.[7] Much of the film is very slow, drawing-room, stage bound dialogue, framed in the proverbial proscenium arch, however the few moments like this begin to tap the cinematic possibilities of Dracula on screen.

Dracula's power is visually reinforced when Renfield arrives at the castle. The estate agent is dwarfed by his surroundings: a huge, expressionistic entrance hall, with glowing white pillars, and arched window lit in chiaroscuro. The magnificent winding staircase tumbles away into blackness. Dracula appears at the head of the stairs, holding a single candle, and as he descends Renfield walks across the hall towards him. In a very long, slow shot, he matches the vampire's pace, step for step, giving the scene a nightmarish, somnambulant quality. In medium close up, Dracula smiles ghoulishly and slowly intones, 'I am Dracula'. He opens his arms expansively, then as gracefully as a cat, he begins to ascend once more, expecting Renfield to follow. The light from the windows casts shadowed bars across Renfield: the audience now know that Renfield is imprisoned, even if he hasn't realised it yet. The release of knowledge is important here. The dungeon sequence and Lugosi's welcome conspire to provide the audience with more information than Renfield. We know that Dracula is a vampire, and we can hazard more than a guess at what will befall Renfield. This creates suspense and a horrible, yet delicious anticipation. We will now watch the deadly corruption of this sweet young man as he tumbles into the vampiric abyss.

Ken Gelder argues that the vampire film is fascinated with its own origins at the same time it rejects many of them, that every vampire film creates its own mythologies.

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[6] Tom Brown, Breaking the Fourth Wall: Direct Address in Cinema (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p.14.
[7] Roy Huss, 'Vampire's Progress: Dracula from Novel to Film via Broadway', in Focus on the Horror Film, ed. by Roy Huss and T.J. Ross (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1972), pp.50-51.

He suggests that it is a 'peculiar' genre as it is required to respond to a set of archaic laws or expectations about vampires, in relation to their weaknesses, their modus operandi etc.[8] What have we learned about this version of Dracula from these initial sequences? Initial inspection reveals a great deal of fidelity to Stoker's novel. The vampire lives in a grand and deserted castle in Transylvania, without servants, and sleeps in a coffin. If we delve more deeply into character design and motivation, it is worth thinking in more depth about the protagonist figure and how this is distinct between novel and film. Skal has pointed out two weeks prior to filming, the script had significant 'unresolved problems' including 'the lack of a hero'.[9] The lack of a hero remains an unresolved problem in the finished film. In the novel, Jonathan Harker begins as protagonist but fades away after escaping from Castle Dracula. Back in England, Alan Holmwood, Quincey Morris and Dr Seward compete for Lucy Westenra. Lucy becomes ill and dies, then Mina, Harker's fiancé, grows ill. An ensemble cast – Harker, Professor Van Helsing, Holmwood, Morris and Seward –then pursue Dracula. The ensemble is a major issue for adaptation into other mediums. As Hutchings has noted, while the novel can handle the Crew of Light, collective heroism poses a problem for 'stage and film fictions more used to dealing with a single heroic protagonist'.[10] This film is unable to present a convincing and conventional hero. Renfield quickly becomes Dracula's pet, and Harker is without consequence.

Instead, we can think of Dracula as the protagonist. Although he is rarely on screen in the second act, it is the repercussions of his actions that the other characters must grapple with. In his treatise on the nature of storytelling, John Yorke explains the fundamental importance of desire to character. He explains 'if a character doesn't want something, they're passive. And if they're passive, they're effectively dead'.[11] But we can go further here in a manner fitting to a horror film. Egri argues that the 'pivotal' character (for our purposes, the protagonist), 'must not merely desire something. He must want it so badly that he will destroy or be destroyed in the effort to attain his goal'.[12] Dracula's desires do indeed propel the film narrative; it is his wants and needs

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[8] Ken Gelder, New Vampire Cinema (London: B.F.I., 2012), p.vi.
[9] David J. Skal, Hollywood Gothic: The Tangled Web of Dracula From Novel to Stage to Screen (New York, NY: Faber and Faber, 2004), p.179.
[10] Peter Hutchings, Dracula (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), p.21.
[11] John Yorke, Into the Woods: A Five Act Journey into Story (London: Penguin, 2013), p.8.
[12] Lajos Egri, The Art of Dramatic Writing: Its Basis in the Creative Interpretation of Human Motives (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1960), p.106.

that overwhelmingly consume the thoughts and actions of every other character, and they lead, without a doubt, to repeated life or death situations.

If Dracula is the protagonist then this film is a tragedy. Classically, a tragedy contains 'the noble protagonist, the tragic flaw, the catastrophic fall'.[13] Count Dracula is our noble protagonist, living in a castle, with seemingly untold wealth. Dracula's flaw is built into his essence: he is undead and he survives by drinking the blood of living creatures. But this is merely the story set up: the inciting incident comes with Renfield's arrival and the confirmation of Dracula's relocation. In England he meets Lucy and Mina, and it is here that his desires will spiral out of control. It is his murder and vampirism of Lucy and his pursuit of Mina that leads to his 'catastrophic fall'. In line with this approach, it makes sense to view Van Helsing– who does not appear until almost halfway through the film – as the antagonist. The film concludes with Van Helsing and Harker attempting to rescue Mina from the Abbey. This is not a high stakes endeavour: hypnotised Mina is doing very little at this point beyond wandering around in a duchess satin white slip, while Dracula has scurried back to his coffin and got in. The final moments are also visually anti-climactic, composed of lengthy static long shots and long periods of silence, revealing a director unable to transcend either his theatrical source texts nor his allegiance to silent cinema. Van Helsing kneels over Dracula's coffin, places a stake inside and raises the the hammer in his other hand. Mina then clasps her chest, showing she has recovered, and Dracula's death is implied offscreen. Immensely powerful, supernaturally so, Dracula is undone by his unquenchable thirst for the blood of beautiful young woman. And yet it is the consumption of blood that has given him such power and wealth. His flaw is irreconcilable, and he dies for it. There's fun to be had with thinking of Dracula as a tragic hero, brought down by his desire for two English women, and it also accords with Universal's marketing of the film; the poster tagline is 'the story of the strangest passion the world has ever known!'. Viewing the film in this way, goes some way to alleviating some of the structural and characterisation problems of a weak screenplay based on a flawed stage play, adapted from an epistolary novel that is often criticised for its lack of literary merit.

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[13] David Rain, 'Literary Genres', in The Creative Writing Handbook, ed. by Steven Earnshaw (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p.55.

Upon release, the film was a huge success. It broke house records at the Rialto in Washington, the local press breathlessly reporting on the 'strange, eerie, melancholy, shivery' film that 'has taken the city by storm'. The film industry took note and a glut of horror films went into production. Kyle Edwards points out that 'Dracula introduced conventions and practices that would guide the development, production and marketing of Universal's subsequent horror films', yet I would argue there is more to the film than this statement suggests.[14] The commercial success and rapturous response the film received revealed something incredibly important: that audiences are fascinated by dark characters. There is a good reason for this popularity, one that Universal and other studios were quick to capitalise upon. Audiences are fascinated by dark characters. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are bad, but 'the reason they have so fascinated mankind… since Shakespeare first created them is because, through Shakespeare's empathy with them, we not only understand their badness, we recognise it in ourselves'.[15] When the Count is the dominant character, the tone and experience of the text shifts considerably. This film is the not only the first sound horror film, but the first to allow the audience to fully experience the wants and needs of the vampire. We are welcomed into his lair, we watch him trap his victims, we witness Lucy and Mina willingly succumb. For the first time, we are given a visual and auditory space to identify with the dark recesses of a vampire's soul. *Rob Wagner's Script* may argue that grown-ups like to create moments to frighten people, but what the review fails to recognise is that grown-ups like to be the monsters too.

Interregnum

Universal, unhorrified by its own horrors and wise to a good box office
thing, again has revived its deathless Dracula series.[16]
New York Times 6 November 1943

Three Dracula films were made in 1931. In addition to Browning's film, there was a silent version, and a Spanish version - Drácula (1931, George Melford). Following Browning's success, the vampire proliferated throughout the 1930s but Universal did not return to Dracula until *Dracula's Daughter* (1936, Lambert Hillyer, USA). It was

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[14] Kyle Edwards, "House of Horrors": Corporate Strategy at Universal Pictures in the 1930s', in Merchants of Menace: The Business of Horror Cinema, ed. by Richard Nowell (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p.16.
[15] Potter, Screen Language, p.233.
[16] A.W., 'The Screen in Review', New York Times 6 November 1943, p.16.

enthusiastically received by Frank S. Nugent for the New York Times, who explained 'Miss Dracula' is a chip off the old block', and referencing the black cape, bloodless victims and 'those two telltale marks on the the throat'.[17] Despite the plaudits, horror was on the wane from the middle of the decade. Carl Laemmle was ousted from Universal and their commitment to making A-budget horror films ended; in July 1934 the United States' censorship body the Production Code Administration began to enforce the Production Code where previously it was self regulatory; in the UK the BBFC introduced the H certificate and only passed two horror films in 1936, the latter commenting that *Dracula's Daughter* 'would require the resources of half a dozen more languages to adequately express its beastliness. I consider it absolutely unfit for exhibition as a film'.[18]

Many critics consider the 1940s 'a dismal decade' for horror film, a 'commonly remembered for tired sequels to respected originals'.[19] There were two key strains of horror during this period. Producer Val Lewton made a number of female-centered films at RKO, including Cat People (1942, Jacques Tourneur), which are best described as a 'low budget female gothic and monster movie amalgam'.[20] However, Dracula did not lurk at RKO; he remained tethered to Universal and appeared in the second wave of the studio's productions, the 'tired sequels' including Son of Dracula (1943, Robert Siodmak), House of Dracula (1945, Erle C. Kenton) and House of Frankenstein (1944, Erle C. Kenton). It is worth referencing the strong female focus of RKO as we can see how this approach impacted upon Universal's 1940s productions. Son of Dracula has a contemporary setting, 'Dark Oaks', a plantation home in the Deep South. Dark Oaks is home to Kay Caldwell (Louise Allbritton), whom has lured Count Alucard (Lon Chaney Jr) from Central Europe to stay with her in America. Alucard arrives, marries Kay – much to the dismay of her fiancé Frank – and carries out his vampiric activities. The twist in the tale comes when Alucard's nemesis, Professor Lazlo, realises that Kay does not care about Alucard. She has used him to achieve her dream of immortality. She instructs Frank to kill Alucard, then plans to turn Frank into a vampire as well, so they can be together for all time. The pressbook

[17] Frank S. Nugent, 'The Screen', New York Times 18 May 1936, p.14.
[18] Alison Peirse, After Dracula: The 1930s Horror Film (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), p.3.
[19] Rick Worland, 'OWI Meets Monsters: Hollywood Horror Films and War Propaganda, 1942 – 1945', Cinema Journal 37.1 (1997), 47.
[20] Tim Snelson, Phantom Ladies: Hollywood Horror and the Home Front (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), p.2.

pushes the female angle, making much of the 'two feminine leads – Louise Allbritton and Evelyn Ankers', then describing Allbritton is described as 'the new temptress of terror'.[21]

The strength of this film is the focus on the female protagonist Kay, and her sister, Clare. Yet the vampire is the film's greatest weakness. Chaney Jr is hopelessly miscast as the Count. He is neither repulsive nor seductive, and is entirely unbelievable. As Tom Weaver et al write, Chaney's 'lumberjack physique and Midwestern bearing' was entirely unsuited to the role.[22] However, it is just not Chaney Jr's performance, the script does not care for the vampire either. Although Lugosi's Dracula was predominantly in the beginning and end of the film, his presence motivated and dictated all plot and character function. In Son of Dracula, it is Kay who motivates the story, rejecting Frank, marrying Alucard and becoming a vampire. Her scheming and undead plotting form the central desires of the story. In his article on the crossovers between horror and film noir in the 1940s, Dain Goding even goes as far as to characterise Kay as 'the spider woman', 'the most recognisable and oft-imitated stereotype of film noir – the notorious femme fatale'.[23] Alucard is merely a pawn and lacks any narrative agency. The fact he never realises this at any point further weakens his character. The film concludes as Kay begs Frank to kill Alucard. Frank burns Alucard's coffin, then burns Kay's. The nominal hero is left mourning his lost love. Nobody mourns (nor really notices) Alucard's demise. We have here another tragic protagonist and inevitable vampiric demise, yet the film is made much more interesting due to the strong female lead and the rather impotent, ignorant male vampire caught up in her complex, duplicitous plot. This fascinating shift in the representation of Dracula is then reflective of the increased focus on female cinemagoers and the growing popularity of film noir and the woman's film.

Dracula (1958)

Dracula is one thing to read, quite another thing to see. The earlier film versions (the last, with Bela Lugosi as Count Dracula, was made in Hollywood in 1930), were merely foolish. The present film is foolish and extremely ugly too.[24]

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[21] Snelson, Phantom Ladies, pp.67 - 68.
[22] Tom Weaver, Michael Brunas and John Brunas, *Universal Horrors: The Studio's Classic Films,* 1931 – 1946 2nd edn. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007), p.372.
[23] Dain Goding, 'Shadows and Nightmares: Lewton, Siodmak, and the elusive Noirror Film', Horror Studies, 2.1 (2011), 21.
[24] C.A. Lejeune, 'At the Films: A Taste of Blood', Observer 25 May 1958, p.15.

The second wave of Universal productions concluded by the late 1940s, and until the early 1950s, only Old Mother Riley and Abbott and Costello fraternised with the vampire. For most of the 1950s, Dracula remained a rare visual experience with a few exceptions: *Drakula İstanbul'da* (1953, Mehmet Muhtar, Turkey), The Return of Dracula (1958, Paul Landres, USA) and Blood of Dracula (1957, Herbert L. Stock, USA). However, it was not until 1957 that the beginnings of a significant shift in the cinematic representations of the vampire began to take place. In May 1957, British production company Hammer Films released The Curse of Frankenstein, a film that Observer reviewer C.A. Lejeune ranked as 'among the half-dozen most repulsive films I have encountered'.[25] Emboldened by this strong response (not to mention the excellent box office), six months later Hammer began filming Dracula.

The film begins with a close up of a forbidding stone eagle, the title of the film splashed across the screen in bright red dripping letters, accompanied by a foreboding, crashing score. Sangster's name appears on screen and the camera tracks around the eagle, revealing a stone crypt. The audience are now inside, staring at a coffin marked 'Dracula'. The camera speeds fluidly towards the coffin, but when we reach it, we do not stop. The camera wheels closer and closer until the edges of the coffin are lost beyond the frame. The nameplate rolls ever closer to us, now in close up, now filling the whole screen. Then we stop. Bright red blood spurts onto the nameplate. It drips down, thickly, and obscures the vampire's name. A fade to black concludes the prologue. There is a certain harmony here with the introduction to Lugosi's Dracula in Browning's 1931 film. Although we do not actually meet the vampire himself, we are given the other same reference points at the same early point: the dank, underground lair, the coffin, the inestimable terror of being taken ever closer to a monster against our will. It is another example of excellent visual storytelling. In his treatise on film direction, David Mamet argues 'you always want to tell the story in cuts… through a juxtaposition of images that is basically uninflected'.[26] Good filmmaking then is not about a reliance on imagination (where all action takes place offscreen) or on verbal acuity. This sequence is a series of images: a stone eagle, a crypt, a coffin, blood that introduces us to the story world. It has no dialogue and, like

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[25] C.A. Lejeune, 'At The Films: Dripping Candles', Observer 5 May 1957, p.15.
[26] David Mamet, On Directing Film (New York, NY: Penguin, 1991), p2.

Browning's dungeon prologue, does not require character point of view. The confident framing, the editing, production and sound design explains clearly to the audience what kind of film this is, and what to expect. Where this differs from Browning's film is the pursuit of visual style: Browning's film only has the most intermittent of filmic moments, while Fisher's film is an exercise in cinematic storytelling throughout.

Sangster's script then begins in earnest with a nod to the epistolary novel, as Jonathan Harker reads from his diary in voiceover. He is travelling from Klausenberg to Castle Dracula, ostensibly to become Dracula's new librarian. Harker enters the grand baronial hall and finds a note from Dracula, apologising for his absence. Another dissolve indicates time passing, and a beautiful, bosomy young woman in a flowing pink gown appears, begging him to help her escape. But she runs away and as Harker turns, his eyes open wide. Dracula (Christopher Lee) is at the top of the grand staircase, hidden in shadow. He walks swiftly and confidently down the stairs and into the frame of the camera. As he moves into close up, he smiles a little to the audience. His skin is tanned, his black hair greying at the temples, his teeth are bright white. His starched white collar covers his neck, while his black cape flows down his back. He is self-possessed and courteous, and speaks in a clear, upper class English accent as he briskly welcomes Harker, who is taken to his bedroom.

The introduction of the Count is a pivotal moment in Dracula adaptations. Hutchings argues, 'it is the moment when a sense of an adaptation's specificity, its relationship with and its difference from prior versions of the tale can be signalled most clearly'.[27] This film handles the process of adaptation and storytelling very differently from previous versions. First, there is a strong sense that the script has been produced by a screenwriter, rather than an actor, or someone with a background in theatre. Sangster, while certainly not the most original or radical of writers, was nonetheless attuned to the visual and verbal possibilities of the medium. Here, the introduction offers many visual clues for the audience. Dracula is not the white haired old man of the novel, the pestilent beast in Nosferatu, or the creaking, otherworldly foreign Count embodied by Lugosi. This confident, charming, relatively young man is engaging, enticing even. Barry Forshaw even describes Lee's Count as 'an elegant, dangerously attractive and cultivated figure with immense erotic appeal'.[28] We are drawn in, just as

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[27] Hutchings, Dracula, p.47.
[28] Barry Forshaw, British Gothic Cinema (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), pp.44-45.

Lucy and Mina will be, despite already knowing what kind of a monster he truly is. With each adaptation of Dracula, a new mask can be tried on, one that reflects technological and social possibilities of the period. The principle of the vampire – to drink blood, to kill or transform humans into vampires – remains the same. The fun is in the fashioning of this mask anew: in this film, how the vampire looks, how he moves, who he is, how he operates. Audience pleasure comes from exploring the mask, teasing at its edges, while knowing the essential horror that lurks below the surface.

A long-held piece of wisdom regarding scene structure is 'go in late, get out early', frequently attributed to William Goldman. This means to start the scene as close to the moment of conflict as possible, and to leave before the conflict is resolved. Sangster's simple scene construction reflects this. The prologue, the diary, Harker's entry to the castle, the bride, the introduction to the Count, and the bedroom scene are all short and precise, and take place within the first nine minutes of the film. They are far shorter than in previous adaptations, focussing quickly on the dramatic question of the scene, and creating a strong narrative momentum.

This principle extends to the structure of the film as a whole, which has been condensed and radically simplified. By setting the entire story in one place, the journeying between England and Transylvania is moot. The Holmewood residence and the castle are the two main locations and characters are able to travel between them in a short space of time. Supporting characters are cut out, combined or simplified. Van Helsing is the clear protagonist, Dracula the antagonist, Lucy and Mina are female victims and Arthur is the confused man at the centre of the two vampirised women. As a result, the plot moves far faster compared to Browning's film. The first turning point is at nine minutes when, Harker's bedroom, Dracula sees a photograph of Lucy Holmewood, Harker's fiancée. Her sepia picture is lingered upon in close up. Dracula murmurs 'charming, charming', then subtly bites the inside of his cheek, twice. The vampire takes his leave and Harker reveals in his diary that he is a vampire hunter, here to destroy Dracula. Act One concludes at a brief twenty-two minutes as Harker stakes the vampire bride, then is caught by Dracula. Harker is set up as the initial protagonist then destroyed. This reveals not only the power and cunning of the count, but also the escalating stakes of the story: who will stop the Count now?

The beginning of Act Two quickly establishes the real protagonist. Van Helsing appears, on the trail of his missing friend. He discovers the castle, the staked woman and Harker, now a vampire. Van Helsing approaches his friend's coffin, a stake and

hammer in his hand, the fade to black signalling what is to happen in the darkness. This is a crucial moment for character development. Egri argues that a good pivotal 'character must have something very vital at stake'.[29] This quote has not been chosen just for the less than subtle vampire pun. Van Helsing now has two reasons to pursue Dracula. The first is the most noble, and longstanding: he wishes to destroy the vampire and end his reign of terror. The second is revenge, one of the most primal and universal impulses. He must now avenge loyal Harker, a good man forced to endure death twice, once by Dracula, and again, at the point of his best friend's stake. At the same time, the plot point set up with the photograph of Lucy produces motivation for Dracula. Harker kills his bride, and Dracula pursues Lucy as her replacement. The Count has suffered loss, and Harker's friends will suffer punishment as retribution.

The majority of Act Two explores the repercussions of Dracula's attacks on Lucy and how Van Helsing responds to them. We watch her death, her return, and her predilection for feeding on children. The second act concludes in the family crypt with Van Helsing staking Lucy; her brother Arthur watches in sobbing disbelief. Act Three is where Dracula, has yet again, made a mistake by turning his attention to Mina (Arthur's wife here) so soon after Lucy, with Van Helsing already on his trail. Dracula kidnaps Mina and buries her in the castle grounds, then runs into baronial hall. Arthur stops to dig his wife up, leaving Van Helsing free to face his adversary in a thrilling fight. Egri suggests the 'antagonist is necessarily as strong and, in time, as ruthless as the pivotal character. A fight is interesting only if the fighters are evenly matched'.[30] The quality of matching is evident in the final altercation, violent and extremely physical, actors and camera alike darting and whirling around the room. Dracula throws a burning candlestick at the vampire hunter, then lunges at him, strangling him. He overpowers him with ease, and pushes him onto his back and to the floor. The attractive Count is no longer polished and refined. His eyes are bright red, his hair is in disarray, his face a mask of rage – and desire. Van Helsing pretends to pass out, then as the Count leans in to his neck to administer a vampire kiss, Van Helsing throws him off, sweating, and faces him once more. Van Helsing's strength is not only his knowledge but also his ability to recall it and apply it in situations at moments of high stress. He notices the grand red curtains, draped ceiling to floor, and hurls himself

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[29] Egri, The Art of Dramatic Writing, p.107, his emphasis.
[30] Egri, The Art of Dramatic Writing, p.113.

onto the huge dining table. He runs the length of it and launches himself at the curtains, his weight dragging them to the floor. The room floods with morning light.

Dracula is now trapped by his own weaknesses, his 'allergy' to daylight. He falls to the floor, howling, as his feet crumble in the strong sunlight. With a second, kinetic bound, Van Helsing is on the table once more. He grabs two candlesticks, jumps down in front of the wounded vampire, and holds the sticks in the shape of a cross. This is the end. Dracula's hand collapses; he falls onto his back, his face a pile of grey ash. His great cape sinks inwards, sighing, as his body disintegrates below the cut cloth. The final two shots of the film conclude the romantic subplot and the protagonist's endeavour: outside the castle, Mina recovers in Arthur's arms, while Van Helsing gazes out of the stained glass window. The credits roll.

Conclusion

Egri argues that when creating a character, 'we want to know why man is as he is, why his character is constantly changing, and why it must change whether he wishes it or no'.[31] Yet this is one of the few principles that do not apply in the Dracula films. The overarching desires of vampire and hunter do not really change over the course of the story. In the Hammer film, they are worked through in a three act structure, that explores the combat between Dracula and vampire hunters. The first act is the story of Harker in which Dracula triumphs, in the second we experience Lucy's story, in which both Dracula and Van Helsing triumph – Dracula vampirises Lucy as he planned, but Van Helsing stakes her and releases her. In the final act, featuring Mina, Van Helsing rightfully triumphs as the protagonist. Van Helsing's desire to destroy Dracula, and Dracula's desire to endure are unaltered. Rather, Jimmy Sangster's screenplay is an exploration of desires put into opposition with one another.

But why is the story still satisfying if Dracula does not change? This is the nature of the horror film, a genre that Marc Blake and Sarah Bailey describe as 'an upgraded fairy tale'.[32] Indeed, it is the nature of the monster to be relentless, to continue on its path, come what may. In each film explored, the common thread is that Dracula's bloodlust (always twinned with romantic or erotic cravings) is his downfall, his fatal flaw is his yearning for the beautiful young woman that will lead to his destruction,

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[31] Egri, The Art of Dramatic Writing, p.33.
[32] Marc Blake and Sara Bailey, Writing the Horror Movie (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.181.

whether that is the ethereal young Mina in 1931, treacherous Kay in 1943, or the married and sexually experienced Mina of 1958, who quivers in anticipation of his nightly visit. While the nature of the vampire may remain the same across the decades, his role changes greatly. The confused script and lack of understanding of sound film direction in 1931 casts Dracula as a tragic protagonist. The seismic shifts in American culture and society in the 1940s recast 'Count Alucard' as a mere subsidiary plot device. The inconsistency of character role is resolved in the 1950s with Hammer. Dracula is finally cast as the powerful cinematic monster he was destined to become. After staring out of the window, Van Helsing runs his hand through his hair and thoughtfully walks away. He is perhaps ruminating on the success of Sangster's writing and Fisher's direction, the Count satisfactorily characterised, fought and despatched on screen, at long last.

Further Reading

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