Seeing the Vampire in the Cinematic Mirror:
An Examination of Three Early 20th Century Film Adaptations of Stoker’s Dracula

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by
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Introduction

Early adaptations of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) vary immensely but, curiously, a few scenes seem to occur over and over again, coming back to haunt the screen. A vampire—eyes wide and menacing—stares into its victim’s eyes and makes them do things against their will. Variations on this scene in early 20th century adaptations of *Dracula* are horrifyingly similar and yet, interestingly, nothing quite like these scenes takes place in Stoker’s novel. Is it merely a coincidence that three films—one 1922 film and two from 1931—contain this specific demonstration of an extremely powerful and altogether mysterious nonverbal language? Or is there something particularly important about the thematic content of these scenes—something that perhaps is carried over from these films’ original source? This is a question to which I will return time and time again, and a question that epitomizes the very essence of my overarching academic quandary.

This paper will first explore the connections between Stoker’s *Dracula* and its early cinematic adaptations, in order to explain the adaptations’ interests in being meta-cinematic.\(^1\) From their conceptions, the story of the Transylvanian Count and the moving image were linked—*Dracula* is published just two years after the first film is publically screened;\(^2\) and it seems like the two have never really left each other’s side. *Dracula* scholar David Skal has catalogued more than 200 films that include the character Dracula. Not all of these films stay true to the course of Stoker’s novel or even have the character of Dracula as their principal antagonists, but there is no doubt that the terrifying Transylvanian Count has haunted the public imagination since his first appearance in 1897. Otherworldly, mysterious, there-but-not-there, a

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1. I define meta-cinema as the phenomenon of film being aware (and conveying its awareness) that it is film.
living dead—Stoker’s Dracula (and the figure of the vampire in general) and cinema have much in common. His quality of being an outsider, a threatening and deadly force, attempting to invade a civilized land is the perfect allegory for the moving picture—a new technology that, during the early 20th century, was infiltrating the homes of people around the world.

The figure of the vampire was extremely common in the early years of cinema, as Michael J. Murphy notes in his book, *The celluloid vampires*:

> In 1909, the first of the “vamp” films appeared. The word “vampire” was used to describe a beautiful woman, who entices, captivates, exploits and ruins her love. During the period 1909 to 1919, there were at least 40 films of this type produced. (4)

So there obviously seems to be some inherent connection between the figure of the vampire and cinema. This paper will specifically look at Stoker’s novel and its first three (still available) film adaptations, and their awareness of their connection with the early years of cinema. It will argue that Stoker’s novel turns out to be extremely useful for early film to think about its own medium—and the films that I will examine grabbed hold of an opportunity to comment on both the medium of cinema and their own contributions to its growing legacy. Finally, it will look at what this meta-cinema, present in all three films, seems to signify.

In order to accomplish this analytic task, this paper will first look at Stoker’s novel (with the assumption that its filmic adaptations portray meta-cinema—although I will provide evidence for this claim later) in an attempt to account for the very close attention that the films pay to their own medium and their roles in creating a legacy for that medium. As it turns out, and as many scholars have noted, Stoker’s novel is strangely modern; and its titular vampire, an ironic figuration of modernity as it was perceived at the turn of the 20th century. Scholars such as Michael J. Murphy, Ronald R. Thomas and Barbara Laner have turned to some of the first descriptions that the reader gets of Dracula and his Transylvanian Castle in order to pinpoint and
describe this irony. Daniel Martin, among others, has thought about the modern technologies that Stoker brings into the novel—the typewriter and the phonograph, to name a few. The novel’s attention to portraying the modern, I will argue, will become very useful in thinking about how the films refer, time and time again, to their own positions within in the modern world. It seems as though directors and screenwriters not only picked up on this extremely strange and counterintuitive aspect of the novel, but also marked it as a decidedly important aspect of the novel to carry over into its filmic incarnations.

In looking at the novel’s attention to modernity, a theme that has been carried over from novel to film, I will delve into the three earliest Dracula adaptations created in the early 20th century that are still available: F.W. Murnau’s Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens (1922), Tod Browning’s Dracula (1931) and George Medford’s Drácula (1931). I will explore these films’ hauntingly similar meta-cinematic moments, in addition to peripherally related aesthetic qualities of the films that reflect their attention to modernity. I will argue that the films self-consciously refer to their own filmic states of being and that there is basis for this reflection Stoker’s novel and in the folkloric figure of the vampire itself. The three films I will be exploring are extremely distinct from one another—they were produced oceans, centuries and languages apart—and even go as far as to change names of characters, omit characters and major plot points—but all three hold onto this ironic theme of modernity and portray the idea in similar ways. Throughout this paper, I will attempt to account for these films’ interest in being meta-cinematic—most obviously, that they are wrestling with and trying to understand this extremely new medium. But I will also, toward the end of the paper, attempt to offer other questions to think about how we can try to understand and account for the meta-cinema in all three films.
Scholarship has been done on the connection between the vampire and the medium of cinema. Laner, Murphy, Thomas and Martin, among others, refer to this connection between the two—understanding that they are allegorically linked in more ways than one. Laner has also described meta-cinema in *Nosferatu* in her discussion of the film’s engagement in intermedial incorporation. But there is no scholarship (that I know of) that has been done on these three adaptations, their mutual interests in being meta-cinematic and their haunting similarities in their expressions of meta-cinema. I will be discussing these three points of interest throughout this paper.
Chapter 1:
The Past Is Never Dead, It’s Not Even Past

“Some horrors never die; they simply adapt to their changing environment and reproduce themselves in an almost an infinite variety of shapes”
—David Skal, 111

Stoker’s *Dracula*—a tale about a centuries-old Count who moves from one coffin to another in order to sustain his unnaturally long life—ironically, seems to be interested in the cutting-edge modernity of the time in which it came into being. Written just three years before the turn of the 20th century, Stoker’s canonical novel depicts the modernity of the late 19th century and relays a sense that modernity is something to fear. Through the character of Dracula and the increasing prevalence of modern technologies of the time, Stoker conjures an allegory for the prevailing fear that modernity brings. In the novel, the figure of Dracula turns out to be not so much a representation of a character but an embodiment a threat. The vampire, ironically, a figuration of that which is old and ancient, outdated and decayed, at the same time comes to represent the threat of a new, modern technology invading the known world. Some scholars have argued that, in part, it is through his association with the old and the dead that Dracula actually comes to embody an image of the new, the strange, the exotic invading Europe. The shift from the old and understood to the new and horrifying is one that pervades the novel and follows the progression of Dracula’s movement to England. Stoker also fills his novel with cutting references to leading technologies of the time—the phonograph, the typewriter, shorthand, and, in an early version of his manuscript, a camera—creating the appearance of a highly modern

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3 “Stoker’s working notes contain a reference to Dracula registering as a skeleton on photographic film, an effect omitted in the finished novel” (Stoker, Bram, Nina Auerbach, and David J. Skal. *Dracula: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Reviews and Reactions, Dramatic and Film Variations, Criticism.*)
text. As the novel progresses, such technologies end up incorporating and taking the place of the older technology that is handwriting, and so pose as a destructive threat to that which is custom. Additionally, Dracula (and other vampiric beings in the novel) have many specific similarities with the medium of cinema. Vampires and cinema—in their early incarnations—gravitate to very similar thematic elements—such as the occult and the mysterious. The known world is not so known anymore at the start of the 20th century, and Stoker’s Dracula is incredibly interested in demonstrating and discussing the fear that comes with imagining this new, mysterious, unknown world.

Close ties between the figure of Dracula and cinema have been the topic of many pieces of scholarship. I intend to discuss, comment and build upon what has already been said. But it is important to note that a direct correlation between Stoker’s Dracula (and its titular character) and the medium of cinema remains problematic. Although it would be tempting to draw a direct correlation between the two given the fact that Dracula was published just two years after the first public screening of a film, it cannot verifiably be proven. In his article discussing Dracula and cinema, “Some Trick of the Moonlight,” Daniel Martin notes how there is, as of yet, no proof of any correlation: “literary critics and biographers have yet to discover any concrete evidence of a cinematic influence in the novel”(473). Martin cautions against making precisely this comparison: “I do think we need to be careful about how we phrase the discussion of cultural affinities between seemingly connected, yet disparate, events. This is the case especially if we are to highlight the seductive image-world of vampires at work in Stoker’s novel”(473). But I would also like to suggest, and I believe that it can be proven, that Stoker is thinking through a more generalized anxiety at the turn of the 20th century—the anxiety that

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4 “La Sortie de l’Usine Lumière à Lyon” by the Lumiere brothers was the first public screening of a film. It was screened at the Grand Café in Paris in 1895.
comes with the invention of new media. Stoker seems to be primarily interested in thinking about
the consequences that come from the use of new technology used to describe, portray and relive
experience. I will end this chapter by discussing the ties that scholars have already drawn
between Stoker’s Dracula and cinema and I will also add my own evidence to this claim. It is
clear that, whether intentional or not, a multifaceted and extremely strong tie can be drawn
between Stoker’s novel and cinema. This bond, I will argue, is very pertinent and useful when
thinking about the afterlife of Stoker’s novel as it is reincarnated in film a few decades later.

A Modern Horror in an Ancient Body

Throughout the novel, Dracula, as an undead being, is constantly associated with old
texts, old technology and aging spaces. But this association with everything old, dilapidated and
aging, ironically, sets him up to embody a frightening image of modernity as the novel
progresses and as old technologies and landscapes slowly morph into modern ones. Stoker makes
it very apparent that Dracula looks like a walking image of death. Jonathan describes:

His face was a strong—a very strong—aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose
and peculiarly arched nostrils; with lofty domed forehead, and hair growing
scantily round the temples but profusely elsewhere. His eyebrows were very
massive, almost meeting over the nose, and with bushy hair that seemed to curl in
its own profusion. The mouth, so far as I could see it under the heavy moustache,
was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth; these
protruded over the lips, whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality
in a man of his years. For the rest, his ears were pale, and at the tops extremely
pointed; the chin was broad and strong, and the cheeks firm though thin. The
general effect was one of extraordinary pallor. (Stoker, 15)

In effect, Jonathan likes Dracula’s face to a skull. He describes his “arched nostrils,”
“high bridg[ed]” nose, teeth that protrude over his lips and his “broad and strong chin”—features
that recall the pointed, sharp and defined features of a bare human skull. The pallor that Jonathan
describes additionally reinforces the bony, skeletal nature of his visage. But his ancientness is
also suggested in the description of his hair—“bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion.” The overgrown and untamed hair recalls untended moss, growing every which way over the exterior of an ancient, outdated building—an old, dilapidating castle perhaps.

The spaces that Dracula inhabits—at first this is merely Castle Dracula—are all old, dusty, deserted and decaying, reflecting Dracula’s quality of being a dead man walking. Jonathan writes about a room in the castle:

The room was empty! It was barely furnished with odd things, which seemed to have never been used; the furniture was something the same style as that in the south rooms, and was covered with dust. I looked for the key, but it was not in the lock, and I could not find it anywhere. The only thing I found was a heap of gold in one corner—gold of all kinds, Romanian, and British, and Austrian, and Hungarian, and Greek and Turkish money covered with a film of dust, as though it had lain long in the ground. None of it that I noticed was less than three hundred years old. There were also ornaments, some jeweled, but all of them old and stained. (Stoker, 40)

Through Stoker’s great detail, the reader gets a sense of just how ancient Castle Dracula is. It is as though the castle itself is buried beneath the layers of dust (a fact to which Stoker alludes several times just in this passage). The ornaments and gold coins act as relics in a tomb—old, stained and rusted. The language also suggests a quality of being outdated—the coins, which Jonathan contends are more than three hundred years old, are examples of relics from an ancient society—no longer usable in the modern world. Like the coins, Dracula’s books are all outdated. Jonathan remarks: “In the library I found, to my great delight, a vast number of English books, whole shelves full of them, and bound volumes of magazines and newspapers. A table in the centre of was littered with English magazines and newspapers, though none of them were of very recent date”(Stoker, 16). Dracula uses these books to read up on the customs of the English people. He says, “These companions … have been good friends to me, and for some years past, even since I had the idea of going to London, have given me many, many hours of
pleasure”(Stoker, 16-17). Not only are the books themselves outdated but they present an outdated image of England and English customs, which means that Dracula’s knowledge is also outdated.

Like the ancient and dusty Castle Dracula, the houses in England that Dracula uses to store his coffins, and in which he resides, are similarly old, dilapidating and covered with layers upon layers of dust—giving off the impression that they are buried. Just as Dracula resides in a coffin during the daytime, it is fitting that those coffins reside under the ground—in tomb-like houses. In effect, we see that Dracula seeks out spaces in which to bury himself—even in the bustling metropolis of London. Jonathan describes Carfax Abbey:

> The whole place was thick with dust. The floor was seemingly inches deep, except where there were recent footsteps, in which on holding down my lamp I could see marks of hobnails where the dust was cracked. The walls were fluffy and heavy with dust, and in corners were masses of spider’s webs, whereon the dust had gathered till they looked like old tattered rags as the weight had torn them partly down. (Stoker, 215)

When Jonathan first sees Dracula’s second house in Piccadilly Circus, he uses a very similar vocabulary to describe the exterior: “The windows were encrusted with dust, and the shutters were up. All the framework was black with time and from the iron the paint had mostly scaled away”(Stoker, 227). When the team of vampire hunters eventually gets inside, Jonathan notes that “[a]ll [Dracula’s documents] were covered up in thin wrapping paper to keep them from the dust”(Stoker, 258).

Stacy Abbot comments on Dracula’s self-conscious allusions to his own age. He brings into evidence the scene in which Dracula recounts a long history of his family to Jonathan as they sit in the library of Castle Dracula: “the vampire draws attention to his antiquity by describing the people and events of centuries’ worth of national and family
history to the young solicitor Jonathan Harker ‘as if he had been present at them all’” (Abbot, 2).

But, ironically, many scholars have ironically come to view the vampire as a symbol of modernity. In his article “Specters of the Novel,” Ronald R. Thomas suggests that this embodiment of an outdated knowledge actually contributes to the representation of modernity within the character of Dracula:

> It is as if the anachronistic character of English life and manners is bound up with their status as written texts. … And it is through whatever he has absorbed in these texts that the primal and subversive force he represents takes the artificial form of a strange “modern” character when he enters the world of London and takes up his parasitic residence at Carfax Abbey. (293-294)

Barbara Laner, in her essay “Intermedial Incorporation,” also contends that the character of Dracula represents modernity—specifically the modern invention of film—in the way that he absorbs, and is an embodiment of, these older technologies in the process of becoming modern—just as film necessarily absorbs and relies on novel culture of its life. “[T]he vampire serves as the figuration of the process and his urge of feeding on human blood reflects the way film incorporates the aesthetic of other arts without destruction of the latter” (Laner, 1). Adaptations of Dracula will speak directly to this point—the films are technologically modern reincarnations of the older medium of the Victorian novel.

**A Threat to a Medium**

Ironically, Dracula, who is figured as ancient, poses a threat to the older, known art of the written word. There is a distinct shift in Stoker’s novel—as the focus on the written word in the first part of the novel shifts to a focus on temporally advanced technologies for communication.

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5 Internal quotation: Stoker, Bram, 24
This shift is accompanied Dracula’s movement to England and, in turn, as he becomes more of a threat not only to Jonathan but also to London. I would like to suggest that the fact this shift from older to modern forms of communication coincides with Dracula emerging as more of a threat, further ties him to new, modern, and perhaps, as we will see, frightening technologies of the age. Dracula is actually an embodiment of this shift, and, as a result, an embodiment of the process of incorporation. In the first part of the novel, detailing solely Jonathan’s experience within Castle Dracula, Stoker presents the narrative as a hand-written one. The narration either comes from Jonathan’s journal or letters. At one point, Jonathan calls attention to the aged practice of handwritten diary-keeping by comparing his diary to old novels: “(Mem., this diary seems horribly like the beginning of the ‘Arabian Nights,’ for everything has to break off at cockcrow—or like the ghost of Hamlet’s father”(Stoker, 25). In another instance, he quotes Hamlet: “Up to now I never quite knew what Shakespeare meant when he made Hamlet say:—‘My tablets! quick, my tablets!/ ’Tis meet that I put it down,’ etc”(Stoker, 31). The older practice of writing with pen and ink is fitting in the ancient, decomposing castle and Dracula aids this textuality—forcing Jonathan to write hand-written letters to his fiancé and boss. But the technology gradually gets more advanced as the narrative follows Dracula outside of the castle and out of Transylvania into modern London.

The first reference to one of the more modern forms of communication comes in Mina’s first letter to Lucy. It also comes at the first time that the reader is privy to narration outside of the Transylvanian landscape:

I have been practising shorthand very assiduously. When we are married I shall be able to be useful to Jonathan, and if I can stenograph well enough I can take down what he wants to say in this way and write it out for him on a typewriter, as which also I am practicing every hard. He and I sometimes write in shorthand, and he is keeping a stenographic journal of his travels abroad. (Stoker, 46)
The fact that Stoker first introduces a new technology of the time (the stenograph) through Mina’s first letter suggests that the threat of modernity is located within the European city—in this case, London, as opposed to within the ancient, Transylvanian landscape, which is geographically secluded, seemingly lacking in modern technology, filled with the undead and folklore. This citation also references the transference between modes of writing—a theme that will be increasingly prevalent in the novel. Mina suggests that she will convert her shorthand notes to typed notes. In this conversion, Mina performs the act of replacing the old technology of handwriting to the new technology of type. Later in the novel, Mina types Jonathan’s journal entries on her typewriter so that, as she concludes, it can be easily accessible to a larger public. Mina writes in her journal, “I shall get my typewriter this very hour and begin transcribing. Then we shall be ready for other eyes if required” (Stoker, 153). Dr. Seward also replaces the traditional practice of writing by hand in a journal with phonographic dictation. His conversation with Mina when she first hears him speaking into the machine evidences just how new this technology is—Mina, who is, for the most part, in touch with modernity, seems to have never heard of it. Seward says: “‘I was only entering my diary.’ ‘Your diary?’ I [Mina] asked him in surprise. ‘Yes,’ he answered. ‘I keep it in this.’ As he spoke he laid his hand on the phonograph. I felt quite excited over it, and blurted out:—‘Why, this beats even shorthand!’” (Stoker, 188)

Indeed, the phonograph was invented in 1877 (only two decades before the publication of Dracula). Mina later describes the phonograph as a “wonderful machine but it is cruelly true” as she notes, “It told me, in its very tones, the anguish of your heart. It was like a soul crying out to Almighty God” (Stoker, 190). Mina’s description focuses on the sense of reality or closeness that this new technology provides. The phonograph provides, as Mina notes “in its very tones” a

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6 “History of the Cylinder Phonograph - Inventing Entertainment: The Early Motion Pictures and Sound Recordings of the Edison Companies.”
much more lifelike representation of the work than a typewriter or a handwritten note would, for 
example. The possibility of hearing the speaker’s intonation and cadence is a possibility that 
offers a great deal more reality than previous technology. Silent film is the next step in the 
trajectory of technology becoming closer to the audience, followed by sound film. Walter 
Benjamin notes that this desire to become “closer” in reproduction is a tenant of the modern 
consciousness. “Namely, the desire of contemporary masses to bring things “closer” spatially 
and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness the 
uniqueness of reality by accepting its reproduction” (66). It is significant that Dracula is the 
cause of this intermedial shift. It is because of the vampire hunt that the handwritten documents 
must be translated from media to media—the whole party must have access to all the documents 
and they must easily be able to read them in a structured manner. So Dracula is not only tied to 
this shift, he is responsible for it—adding to the image of modernity he ironically represents.

It is clear that as the novel progresses, there is an increasing threat of new technologies 
replacing older ones—a threat that Dracula film adaptations themselves also embody. I will 
examine this idea more closely in the following chapter. But it is pertinent to note that this is the 
threat that seems to traverse both the novel and its filmic adaptations and link these works 
together. The horror of the new, and specifically that new replacing the old, is not an novel fear 
but it is pertinent at the turn of a century when so many advances are taking place—including, 
and possibly most visible, advances in cinema.

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7 Qtd. in The Nineteenth-century Visual Culture Reader
A Threat to the Victorian Character

Because Dracula seems to pose a threat is to the medium of the written word, he is, as a result, a threat to the character that relies on that medium—the Victorian character. Thomas argues this point. He says that in this novel, a novel that comes at the end of the Victorian era, that the character of Dracula actually works to destroy the idea of the Victorian “individual.”

Thomas writes: “Uncertainty about the status of persons and historical consciousness is absolutely central to the plot of Dracula, a story in which a spectral figure from the past literally threatens to extinguish the will and agency of Victorian character as they exist in a series of stock Victorian characters in the present” (291). Thomas argues that Dracula is responsible for this extinguishing of the Victorian character as he lives “by drawing its lifeblood from the present and transforming individual characters into zombie-like automata, essentially denying them their character and autonomous agency” (291). Thomas contends that it is only through destroying textual evidence of the Victorian character, that Dracula can accomplish this goal. “[Dracula’s] objective can only be achieved by producing and then destroying the very written media which that hallucination vampirically occupies and usurps” (Thomas, 194). Thomas argues that cinema also takes on this task of erasing the modern character:

Like Dracula himself, the cinema erases the continuous interiority—or the “stream of consciousness”—that composes the individual “Victorian” character, replacing the more unified conception of the self with a sequence of post-Victorian “frames” of mind, a self composed of series of discrete, fragmented mechanical images that engender a past to which the viewer cannot return and a future she cannot fully occupy. (306)

Indeed, in his prose, Stoker seems to suggest that the Victorian notion of a deep and complex character rests on their own documentation in which they relay their deepest secrets and fears, experiences and adventures. These documents are also severely at risk for much of the novel. When Mina first meets Dr. Seward, the two are weary of each other until they read or...
listen to one another’s personal journals. Here, personal written or dictated narratives become a source for intimate knowledge about a character—and these documents are presented as possibly the only means through which a person can really know another. Mina says to Seward, “‘You do not know me,’ I said. ‘When you have read those papers—my own diary and my husband’s also, which I have typed—you will know me better’” (Stoker, 189). Seward uses the same logic when he allows Mina to listen to his phonographic records: “Take the cylinders and hear them—the first half-dozen of them are personal to me, and they will not horrify you; then you will know me better” (Stoker, 189-190). Thomas suggests that Dracula serves as a threat to the Victorian character because he destroys the texts. After Dracula attacks Mina, he makes it a priority to destroy the vampire hunters’ documentation: “All the manuscript has been burned, and the blue flames were flickering amongst the white ashes, the cylinders of your phonograph too were thrown on the fire, and the wax had helped the flames” (Stoker, 244).

**Dracula as Technology and as Scientist**

I would like to suggest that Dracula is also representative of advanced science and technology in other ways besides possibly being an allegory for intermedial incorporation. Dracula (as he is a vampire) is like nothing in the known world—that is, he represents an increased level of immortality. Even though Dracula is obviously susceptible to a finite death, as becomes clear with Lucy’s death in the middle of the novel and Dracula’s own death at the end, he is also capable of life after death—the quality that most compellingly signifies him as an alien or otherworldly being. His capacity to live after death, I would suggest, and Van Helsing seems to suggest as well, can be read as a kind of scientific technology. Van Helsing says: “Here, there is one thing which is different from all recorded; here is some dual life that is not as the
common” (Stoker, 172). Van Helsing’s phrase “Different from all recorded” suggests a discovery—in this case, the discovery of a new technology. Van Helsing likens Dracula to the discovery in electrical science: “Let me tell you, my friend,” says Van Helsing, “that there are things done to-day in electrical science which would have been deemed unholy by the very men who discovered electricity—who would themselves not so long before have been burned as wizards” (Stoker, 164).

When Jonathan first sees Dracula resting in his coffin, among piles of dust, the idea that Dracula is something new, something never-before seen or heard of comes through in Jonathan’s description of Dracula’s physique. Jonathan notes, “He was either dead or asleep, I could not say which—for the eyes were open and stony, but without the glassiness of death—the cheeks had the warmth of life through all their pallor; the lips were as red as ever. But there was no sign of movement, not pulse, no breath, no beating of the heart” (Stoker, 41). This eeriness that Jonathan seems to feel, is part of what makes Dracula so strange and otherworldly—a quality that Van Helsing refers to as “different from all recorded.” Part of the reason for this eeriness is a clear ambivalence as to whether Dracula is alive or dead. Some of his features suggest that he is dead—the “open and stony eyes,” the “pallor” and his lack of the vital signs of life. But equally as many features suggest that he is alive—the “warmth of life” in the cheeks, the red lips and the lack of glassiness about his eyes. Adding to this ambiguity, Jonathan finds Dracula in a strange, mutilated coffin—“pierced with holes here and there.” The holes within the coffin suggest Dracula’s state of limbo: dead but alive. He is placed within a universally legible symbol of death but the symbol is distorted—punctured with holes, suggesting that it is an encasement for something. The thing inside must be able to breathe. So, this new symbol reads as something familiar but different. James C. Holte notes in his work Dracula in the Dark, that his colleague
Ken Geller has claimed: “the vampire is an uncanny figure, simultaneously unfamiliar and familiar” (Holte, 112). And this symbol, unlike anything in the known world, fittingly serves as the habitat for the mysterious and strange creature that is unlike anything known—not dead or alive.

As Van Helsing is trying to convince Seward of the existence of the vampire, he (possibly without realizing it) describes the vampire as a modern invention by comparing the vampire to other scientific technologies and theories of the late 19th and early 20th centuries: He asks rhetorically: “I suppose now you do not believe in corporeal transference. No? Nor in materialization. No? Nor in astral bodies. No? Nor in the reading of thought? No? Nor in hypnotism—“Yes,” I said. “Charcot has proved that pretty well” (Stoker, 163). Even though Seward does not seem to believe in most of these scientific theories, it is clear that Van Helsing does, and so he aligns his perceived legitimacy of the vampire with his perceived legitimacy of these theories. By doing so, he gives legitimacy to the idea of the vampire while, at the same time, placing it within a scientific context, among other scientific theories of the day.

But Dracula himself seems to be a kind of scientist—in both life and death. Van Helsing notes how he was a scientist (an alchemist) during his lifetime: “As I learned from the researches of my friend Arminus Buda-Pesth, he was in life a most wonderful man. Soldier, statesman, alchemist—which latter was the highest development of the science-knowledge of his time. He had a mighty, brain, a learning beyond compare” (Stoker, 259). But Van Helsing also suggests that he remains a scientist even in life as an undead being:

Well, in him the brain powers survived the physical death … He is experimenting, and doing it well; and if it had not been that we have crossed his path he would not be yet—he may be yet if we fail—the farther or furtherer of a new order of beings, whose road must lead through Death, not Life. (Stoker, 259)
Van Helsing’s notion that Dracula has retained his scientific mind and is “experimenting” suggests that the undead Dracula is acting as a scientist after death. He is an inventor—attempting to create a “new order of beings.”

I would agree with Van Helsing that Dracula remains a kind of scientist and is seen as such—and in multiple lights. Among what can be seen as some of his scientific achievements is Dracula’s ability to communicate through new (although seemingly unrealistic) types of language, an idea that recalls the changing mechanisms of communication at the time of *Dracula’s* publication. Similarly, these modern mechanisms of the late 19th century quite possibly seemed just as unrealistic to the public at the time of their conception, just as Dracula’s forms of communication seem in the novel. Van Helsing notes that Dracula has the ability to speak to and understand animals: “he can command all the meaner things: the rat, and the owl, and the bat—the moth, and the fox, and the wolf” (Stoker, 203). Jonathan writes in his journal: “Somewhere high overhead, probably on the tower, I heard the voice of the Count calling in its harsh, metallic whisper. His call seemed to be answered from far and wide by the howling of wolves.” (Stoker, 39) Not only is Dracula speaking the language of wolves, Jonathan’s description of the Count’s voice as “metallic” recalls the metal communication technology of the day—telegraph machines, typewriters and phonographs.

Dracula also uses a language through which he can speak without using words. He uses this new, silent language with Renfield and as well as with Mina. Here, Renfield accounts how he has silently communicated with him from outside his cell:

> He raised his hands, and seemed to call out without using any words. … A dark mass spread over the grass, coming on like the shape of a flame of fire; and then He moved the mist to the right and left, and I could see that there were thousands of rats with their eyes blazing red—like His, only smaller. He held up his hand, and they all stopped; and I thought he seemed to be saying: ‘All these lives will I give you, ay, and many more and greater, through countless ages, if you will fall
down and worship me!’ And then a red cloud, like the colour of blood, seemed to close over my eyes; and before I knew what I was doing, I found myself opening the sash and saying to Him: ‘Come in, Lord and Master!’ (Stoker, 239-240)⁸

In this passage, Dracula again communicates with animals, but he is also communicating silently: “He held up his hand, and they all [the rats] stopped.” This is not the “metallic whisper” that Jonathan heard overhead while imprisoned in Castle Dracula. This is a new form of communication—more reminiscent of Van Helsing’s description of “command[ing] all the meaner things.” But in this passage, Dracula also performs nonverbal communication when speaking to Renfield—and on an very detailed level: “he seemed to be saying: ‘All these lives will I give you, ay, and many more and greater, through countless ages, if you will fall down and worship me!’” Renfield’s description of what Dracula “seems to be saying” to him is incredibly detailed and specific—perhaps representing a more advanced language than when he merely “commands[s] all the meaner things.” Dracula also uses a type of non-verbal communication with Mina in the form of hypnosis: “If it be that she can, by our hypnotic trance, tell what the Count see and hear, is it not more true that he who have hypnotize her first, and who have drink of her very blood and make her drink of his, should, if he will, compel her mind to disclose to him that which she know?”(Stoker, 277)

The fact that Dracula is speaking new and inhuman forms of language speaks to the idea that new technologies actually create new languages—telegraphic and shorthand codes for example.⁹ In the next two chapters, I will discuss how film adaptations of Dracula are interested in representing this idea of Dracula’s ability to communicate via alternate and new and inhuman languages.

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⁸ This quotation will be very important in thinking about filmic portrayals of vampiric language.  
⁹ These modern methods of communicating are both referenced in the novel.
Dracula and Cinema—They Go Hand and Hand

Although the character of Dracula is generally representative of technology, the new and unknown, there is also something very distinct that ties Dracula specifically to the technology of film. Whether Stoker was thinking about film or not remains unclear. Cinema was a very new technology when Dracula was published and we cannot be certain that Stoker had actually seen moving pictures by the time he published his novel. But in his very quality of being undead, Dracula can be seen as an embodiment of film, a medium that preserves experience for eternity, onscreen, assuming the film itself is preserved. Stoker’s working title for the novel was actually “The Undead” (Riley), suggesting that the concept of death as reversed is absolutely central to the plot of the novel and right at the forefront of Stoker’s thinking. Of course, filmic preservation and re-presentation is not completely comparable to the idea of life after death (film is merely image on a screen, and, in the early years, black and white) but neither is Dracula. In Stoker’s novel, Dracula is figured as a kind of phantom or a ghost—a being that is not completely corporeally solid and present. The vampire can appear and disappear and fade into dust. He had no shadow or reflection in the mirror. The vampiric body seems to be one of no substance. As Catania Saviour notes, “Dracula's is the body of no body” (230). As Van Helsing describes, “he can grow and become small; and he can at times vanish and come unknown” (Stoker, 203). Laner argues, “Bram Stoker describes the vampire as an almost ephemeral figure that has neither a shadow nor a mirror reflection or any other physical features of the living” (3). Like cinema, Dracula appears to embody a fantastic shadow, an illusion, something immaterial. Jonathan describes the immateriality of the female vampires in Castle Dracula: “There was no door near them, and they could not have passed me without my noticing. They simply seemed to fade into the rays of the moonlight and pass out through the window, for I could see outside the dim,
shadowy forms for a moment before they entirely faded away” (Stoker, 33). In the scene in which the group of vampire hunters, led by Van Helsing, goes to (again) kill Lucy in her grave, there is a similar description: “We looked on in amazement as we saw, when he stood back, the woman, with a corporeal body as real at that moment as our own, pass in through the interstice where scarce a knife-blade could have gone” (Stoker, 182). Jonathan also marvels at Dracula’s quality of being not completely there: “Once there appeared a strange optical effect: when he stood between me and the flame he did not obstruct it, for I could see its ghostly flicker all the same. This startled me, but as the effect was only momentary, I took it that my eyes deceived me straining through the darkness” (Stoker, 10). In addition to describing Dracula’s incorporeality, this quote also likens seeing the body of the vampire to seeing an illusion—“Once there appeared a strange optical effect,” says Jonathan “my eyes deceived me.” Jonathan often speaks of strange visual illusions climbing down the wall of the castle:

What I saw was the Count’s head coming out from the window. I did not see the face, but I knew the man by the neck and the movement of his back and arms … At first I could not believe my eyes. I thought it was some trick of the moonlight, some weird effect of shadow; but I kept looking and it could be no delusion. (Stoker, 29)

These strange optical effects that Jonathan experiences when he encounters the vampiric body recall the horrifying effects that cinema had on its earliest viewers. One famous anecdote is the horror that Lumière’s short film “L’Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat” (1895), by Auguste and Louis Lumière, produced. According to the now-fabled story, the film’s full-frontal image of a train pulling into a station seemed so real that spectators panicked and some went so far as to jump out of their seats, afraid to be hit by the oncoming train. Hellmuth Karasek notes that the “the spectators felt physically threatened and panicked” (154). Dracula authority Lotte Eisner notes, “spectators in the Grand Café involuntarily threw themselves back in their seats in fright,
because Lumière's giant locomotive pulling into the station seemingly ran toward them”(100-101).

Maxim Gorky, after seeing a motion picture for the first time in 1896, reflects on this strange quality of cinema as reminiscent of a shadow or something that is not really there:

Last night I was in the Kingdom of shadows. If you only knew how strange it was to be there. It was a world without sound, without colour. Everything there—the earth, the trees, the people, the water and the air—is dipped in monotonous grey. … It is not life but its shadow, it is not motion but its soundless spectre. (Gorky, qtd. in “Some Trick of the Moonlight”)

In characterizing cinema as a “shadow” or a “spectre” and by noting its dulled colorless, soundless quality, Gorky describes cinema as something that is just as surreal and unbelievable as the vampire. The cinema, like the vampire, is an image projected on a screen. Gorky notes how cinema is specifically not an exact reincarnation of life. It is a representation—but a dulled, colorless one that has distinct and important differences from life that make it something in and of itself and self-consciously different from lived experience.

In the novel, not only is the vampiric body immaterial and incorporeal—it also can vanish completely from the world—as if it were never really there. In his journal, Jonathan notes: “The Professor says that if we can so treat the Count’s body, it will soon fall into dust”(Stoker, 288). And indeed, when Jonathan finally stabs Dracula in the heart and cut off his head, he vanishes—all his substance miraculously disintegrates: “It was like a miracle; but before our eyes, and almost in the drawing of a breath, the whole body crumbled into dust and passed from our sight”(Stoker, 324). These descriptions of Dracula’s body, and the bodies of other vampires of his age, disintegrating into dust, like the descriptions of the vampiric immateriality, are very common throughout the novel.
In addition to their similar aesthetic qualities, Dracula and cinema also have thematic qualities in common—both are based on a premise of the occult, the mystical, the magical and the unbelievable. Arguably the first incarnation of cinema was produced with a device named the “magic lantern.” It is clear that the idea that film is somehow magical was present from its inception. Laner notes how cinema has always tended to depict the supernatural:

Given the vast technical possibilities that the medium provides, the portrayal of the fantastic has always been a main concern of film. Cinematic techniques and trick shots allow the representation of the supernatural and monstrous in a seemingly real way. Thus, cinema as a technological device causes and represents the unease and allows projecting this feeling in the figure of the vampire mirroring film in the beginnings of cinema. (Laner, 2)

The earliest living film adaptation of Dracula F.W. Marnau’s Nosferatu: Eine Symphonie Des Grauens, (1922), for example, is very interested in producing trick shots on screen. Laner cites this quote: “These tricks are genuine features of the new medium film, they explicitly put film and cinema itself on display”(Peucker 77). Shots of Count Orlok (Nosferatu’s version of Count Dracula) commonly involve trick photography. Orlok appears and disappears into thin air, moves at an inhuman speed and seems to defy gravity. But this was a general trend in early film. Tom Gunning speaks about the idea of the trick film in his article “Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Gardes:” “The trick film, perhaps the dominant non-actuality film genre before 1906, is itself a series of displays, magical attractions rather than a primitive sketch of narrative continuity. … The story simply provides a frame upon which to string a demonstration of the magical possibilities of the cinema”(383). Like the fantastic vampire, cinema was originally seen as a trick or magical medium that would provide entertainment in creating images and sequences that were fantastic, magical and seemingly impossible in the world off-screen.
This sense of voyeurism is an aspect of cinema that has interested many scholars. It is the idea that because cinema is a medium that involves looking, being fixated on the image at hand, there is a kind of sensuality and sexuality associated with that intimate gaze. *Dracula* is also concerned with the seduction of an image. Jonathan partakes in voyeurism as he watches the spectacle that is the vampire climb down the walls of his castle, like a lizard:

> What I saw was the Count’s head coming out from the window. I did not see the face, but I knew the man by the neck and the movement of his back and arms … At first I could not believe my eyes. I thought it was some trick of the moonlight, some weird effect of shadow; but I kept looking and it could be no delusion. (Stoker, 29)

As if he was watching a film, Jonathan amazed by the seeming impossibility of what he witnesses. Here, it is as if Jonathan is watching trick cinema with a sense of amazement; but in reality, is watching an allegorical figuration of trick cinema—the figure of Dracula in all of his supernatural glory.

When Jonathan comes into contact with the female vampires at Castle Dracula, the description of his visual experience is also reminiscent of the audience’s voyeurism while watching a film:

> I was becoming hypnotized! Quicker and quicker danced the dust; the moonbeams seemed to quiver as they went by into the mass of gloom beyond. More and more they gathered till they seemed to take dim phantom shapes. And then I started, broad awake and in full possession of my senses, and ran screaming from the place. The phantom shapes, which were becoming gradually more materialized from the moonbeams, were those of three ghostly women to whom I was doomed. (Stoker, 38)

Here, Jonathan’s vision of dust particles animating into “phantom shapes” recalls phantom images dancing across the movie theater screen. Jonathan is clearly transfixed by these seductive women, but also by the fantastic image of the phantom shapes unfolding before him. “[S]eduction functions as a kind of keynote holding together both Stoker’s undead bodies and those similarly
“undead moving images of the early cinema,” notes Martin (473-474). Jonathan’s proclamation that he is becoming “hypnotized” recalls a seductive element to the vision—he cannot look away.¹⁰ He is drawn and trapped within the vision of these beautiful women appearing out of dust. It is important to note that Jonathan undergoes this seductive visual experience while looking at female vampires who are also presented as sexualized, erotic beings. Assumedly, Jonathan is not only hypnotized and seduced by the fantastic quality of the vision appearing before him but he is also drawn to the sexualized womanly figures.

In the next chapter, I will argue that some of the first filmmakers to adapt Dracula took the novel’s attention to modernity and used it as a basis for filmic self-referentiality.

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¹⁰ Eye fixation, the type of hypnosis that Jonathan seems to be alluding to, is the most common type of hypnosis in the 19th and 20th centuries and readers of Dracula would have generally understood the concept. In eye fixation, the hypnotizer commands the subject to visually focus on an object in order to become hypnotized. James Braid (1795-1860), often termed the “Father of Hypnosis,” was known for using eye fixation.
Chapter 2: 
Dracula’s Cinematic Debut

“And now gentleman, here is another type of vampire: a polyp with claws—transparent, without substance, almost a phantom.”
—Nosferatu: Eine Symphonie Des Grauens (1922)

Stoker copyrighted his famous horror novel for theatrical reproductions actually eight days before the novel was released. He hastily put together a script titled Dracula: or The Un-Dead, a dramatic reading of which was performed on May 18 1897 to a crowd of two. “By submitting the play to the Lord Chamberlain’s Office he was effectively ensuring he retained copyright over the characters and the plot of his novel in so far as their use on the stage was concerned,” writes Greg Buzwell. James C. Holt suggests that the immediate theatrical copyright speaks to the fact that Stoker had already realized his novel’s “dramatic possibilities”(xv). Whether this is true or not, there have indeed been more than a few reincarnations of the undead Count—in theater and in cinema. He has become one of the most canonic and iconic figures in horror film. In his book The Celluloid Vampires, Michael J. Murphy contends that since the invention of film, vampires have always been a strong source for filmic subject matter. Gorges Méliès is credited for producing the first vampire film—“Le Manoir du Diable” or “The Devil’s Manor” (1896) (Murphy, 1) but vampires were the subject of many subsequent films during the first decade of the 20th century: “Between 1909 and 1923, at least twenty-three vampire movies were made of which only Murnau's film is based on Bram Stoker”(Laner, 89). One reason for this prevalence of vampiric characters in early film may be the fantastic nature of both vampires and of early film. Another could be that the vampire and the

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11 Buzwell, Greg. “Bram Stoker’s Stage Adaptation of Dracula.”
medium of cinema both share qualities of being undead, or brought back to life. But it is clear that since the 1920s, Stoker’s Dracula has held the monopoly on the figure of the vampire in film.

It is rumored that the first film to portray Stoker’s story of Dracula was a 1920 Russian production (Melton, 207). There is no living record of this film and it may very well be common folklore. The first film adaptation of the novel, more likely, was a 1921 Hungarian production, Drackula halála, or Dracula’s death (Gary D. Rhodes). There is some evidence that this film existed and that it was based on Stoker’s novel. The now lost film is said to have been directed by Karoly Lajthay in Vienna. There remains a cast list, film stills and advertisements—all of which give evidence to the existence of the film and point to the fact that the film relied heavily on Stoker’s novel. There also exists a published account from a journalist who reportedly visited the set during the filming of Drakula’s wedding scene. Here is an excerpt:

Drakula’s wedding gives a taste of the film’s energies. There is an immense hall, dressed in marble, with a very, very long and dark corridor in the middle. That is where Drakula lives his mysterious life. It is night. The flutter and shrieks of a multitude of beasts can be heard, and the door in the middle of the hall opens. Beautiful women parade through it, all dressed in dreamlike costumes, all of them being Drakula’s wives. But now Drakula awaits his new woman, the most beautiful and desirable of all. She will be welcomed with a rain of flowers. (qtd. in Rhodes, 28)

There is also a 1921 announcement of the film in the Hungarian Trade publication Kérpes Mozivalág (Rhodes), and four publicity photographs still remain:
Even though it would be impossible to say for certain, scholars are fairly certain that *Drakula halála* was, in fact, an adaptation of Stoker’s novel. Murphy seems to think that it is likely that *Drakula halála* is an adaptation of Stoker’s novel, but believes that it is still an unresolved issue:

“It is possible that this film is a documentary about Vlad Tempes, but it is more likely, considering the popularity of the Stoker novel at the time, to be an attempt at illustration the drama in the new medium of film”(6). Rhodes, however, seems to firmly believe that it is an adaptation in some regard: “Even if it would not become a direct adaptation of the novel,

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Drakula halâla would rely heavily upon it for story ideas; its Drakula was not based on Vlad the Impaler or some new character: Bram Stoker’s Dracula would become Károly Lajthay’s Drakula”(26).

But the first Dracula adaptation still available today is F.W. Murnau’s 1922 film Nosferatu: Eine Symphonie Des Grauens or Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror. The unlicensed German reproduction of Stoker’s novel was the subject of a lawsuit to the production company, Prana, by Stoker’s widow Florence Stoker. Because he had not secured license to adapt the novel, Murnau had presumably foreseen this suit and had hoped to avoid it by changing minor aspects of the narrative. For the film, Jonathan Harker is renamed “Hutter,” Mina is called “Nina” and Count Dracula goes under the name of “Count Orlok.” Van Helsing’s role is drastically minimized to just a few scenes, and he effectively has no role in destroying the vampire. But these revisions did not end up being enough to protect the production, and Prana was ordered to destroy all copies of the film. Fortunately for Dracula scholars and horror aficionados, copies still remain.

Nosferatu has been lauded as one of the most horrifying films, not only in early horror cinema, but in the genre: “[W]hen viewed with the proper pale blue tints for the night scenes and amber tints for the candle light and greens for the underground crypts, and projected at proper projection speed with the original musical score, it becomes truly a ‘Symphony of Horror’ with moments of terror that surpass even today’s shock films”(Riley, 25). I will suggest, and many scholars have agreed, that part of what makes this film so horrifying, may, in fact, be the filmic medium itself. Nosferatu seems to be incredibly self-aware of the extremely new medium that it is inhabiting, and this chapter will delve into the meta-cinematic qualities of the film and attempt to account for them.
On Laner and Meta-Cinema

Laner, who has written about the meta-cinema in *Nosferatu*, argues that the film displays self-awareness through the use of intermedial incorporation. She suggests that the film makes viewers aware that they are specifically watching a film because of its tendency to incorporate other media into the framework of the film. She creates a parallel between the blood-sucking vampire who depends on blood to survive and the film that depends on older media for its life. She argues:

the vampire as a hybrid and cannibalistic figure stands for film as a genuine intermedial art form that absorbs and incorporates the aesthetics of the other arts to develop its own specificity. In the center of attention is the vampire's pivotal role as the link between incorporation on the content and on the formal level. (2)

This meta-cinematic effect, Laner, says creates an anxiety about the new medium of cinema and its threat to literary media. She argues that *Nosferatu* “demonstrates a self-reflexive and metacinematic dimension that fathoms the potential and anxiety the new medium film offers”(3) and quotes other scholars who meditate on this threat. She quotes Anton Kaes: “Many literary critics … saw film as a rival to literature and attacked film adaptations of literary themes and works”(*The Debate About Cinema*, 9) and Joachim Paech: “arguing that film is devouring literary culture”("Literatur und Film,” 51). Meanwhile, in following with the analogy, Laner argues that Count Orlok always tied to the technological qualities of the film—from its association with trick shots to the fast-paced movement of the Demeter at sea. Thus, the vampire (as in the novel) is a threat to older media—media that the film is incorporating but then replacing. Laner suggests that by depicting scenes staged like German expressionist paintings, *Nosferatu* incorporates older media in order to (ironically) emphasize the modernity of the medium, represented in Count Orlok. “The spectators of the lingering romantic painting-like images are reminded of watching a film by the sudden intrusion of movement which at the same
time announces the arrival of Nosferatu”(3). Scenes representing older forms of communication are undermined as Orlok intrudes into their spaces. Laner also notes how the film incorporates numerous images of texts—from inter-titles to the Book of the Vampire. She notes: “The film incorporates the written account in form of book pages and the first person narrator is identified with the author thereof. Besides the written dialogues, Nosferatu incorporates a wide range of other text types into the diegesis of the film”(4). The film’s incorporation, Laner suggests, directly reflects Murnau’s incorporation of Stoker’s novel.

I would also like to suggest that in referencing these older media within his film, Murnau causes the viewer to realize that this film is precisely not part of these older traditions. It is the same way that, as I mention in Chapter 1, in making Dracula an embodiment the old, ancient and outdated, Stoker calls attention to the newer forms of technology that he references in the novel.

In addition to its self-conscious threat to older media, Laner argues that Murnau’s film demonstrates how these order medium also sustain this new media of film media. Media depend on the works of its same or other media—that have come before it. Nosferatu relies on the energy from these other art forms, and on Stoker’s novel, without actually causing death or destroying them. The film relies on the novel for its life but like a vampire, it also poses a threat—sucking out the life for its own benefit. “Within the safe frame of the analogy, we can assume the positive energy film gains from the ‘life essences’ of the other arts without the necessary death or destruction of its ‘victims’”(Laner, 2). So is true for Stoker’s novel and Murnau’s adaptation of it—the film feeds off of the novel but, at the same time it does not destroy it—Dracula is still read in many an English literature course as an epitome of Gothic horror. Likewise, as I argue in Chapter 1, Dracula becomes symbolic of new technology because
he feeds off and imbibes the old and outdated in order to come to embody a scientific revelation and a modern phenomenon.

Adaptation theory has, for a long time, thought about the question of replacement—substituting or discarding an old text for another. Mark Brokenshire has written about the conversation surrounding and the anxiety linked to adaptations of novels to films.

Humans have a long history of adapting “texts” into different forms. Historical events and spoken legends were the inspiration for paintings and sculptures, plays, written tales, stained glass windows, and later, stories in the form of the novel.[14] Cinematic adaptations of literary and theatrical texts are as old as the medium of cinema itself,[15] and as long as screen adaptations have existed, so has the tension between literature and film. Leo Tolstoy considered film “a direct attack on the methods of literary art”[16], while Virginia Woolf felt that cinema and literary adaptations in particular, were responsible for the moral decline and vulgarization of modern society, invoking the biological in her description of cinema as a “parasite” and literature as its “prey”[17]. (Brokenshire, Mark. “Adaptation.” The Chicago School of Media Theory.)

It is clear that people were thinking about the problem of replacement both before and after Nosferatu—Tolstoy in the category of the former, and Woolf in the category of the latter. It is also apparent that Murnau’s film is engaging with these fundamental questions of its medium: Is there a danger to adaptation? Is there something to be lost?

Framing the Vampire

I would also like to suggest that the aesthetic qualities of Nosferatu also contribute to its meta-cinematic mission. The image of frames, for example, appears in the film over and over

14 Andre Bazin, “Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest”, in Film Adaptation, ed James Naremore (New Jersey: Rutgers, 2008), 23-4
15 Thomas Leitch, Film Adaptation and its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to The Passion of the Christ. (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 2007), 22.
17 Brokenshire, Mark. “adaptation.”
again, drawing the viewer’s attention to the real-world frame surrounding the moving picture.
Murnau creates frames within his film through the use of iris shots\(^\text{18}\) and a mise-en-scène that specifically frames characters on screen, calling the viewer’s attention to the fact that their sight is limited to and perpetually trapped within the cinematic frame. This framing technique begins at the moment that Hutter first comes into contact with Count Orlok. When Hutter arrives at Count Orlok’s castle, the two characters are framed on screen by the ancient castle’s arches—a technique which draws attention to the fact that the images are taking place screen, encased in a frame.

In this scene, Count Orlok and Hutter are placed in front of arched entryways in his Victorian Castle—looking as though they are encased in layers of circular shadows. The arches work to distinguish the characters from the rest of the scenery, while creating frames (or screens) within the screen of the television. In the case of the layered arches (such as in the film still on

\(^{18}\) I will return to the iris shot technique later in this chapter.

the top right), this frame becomes even more apparent as layers upon layers are piled atop of one another, creating rings around the figures in the center. This, as Laner, would term it, “meta-cinematic” technique, makes the viewer aware of the fact that he or she is looking through a frame or a screen. And the effect is not a subtle one—Dracula scholar David Skal notes: “arching shadows are a recurring visual in Nosferatu”(54).

Thomas discusses this scene, likening the shot of opening of the castle gates to “the parting curtains of a movie screen (or the covers of a massive book)”(295). Thomas describes the previous scene in which Hutter sees Orlok walking towards him from inside the distant castle as a “fade-in seen through the viewfinder of a movie camera”(295). In the space of these juxtaposed scenes, Thomas argues, “the book of vampires is effectively transformed before our eyes into the starkly framed image of Nosferatu, as first we and then Jonathan [Hutter] move from the subject position of readers to the subject position of spectators”(295). In suggesting that the literary image that is evoked with the castle’s opening doors is “transformed” into a filmic one, not only echoes Laner’s theory of intermedial incorporation in the film but also suggests the transition from old to new technology that takes place in the original novel, as I argued in Chapter 1, and that here, Orlok serves as a figuration of this transformation, tying him to the medium of cinema.

Another scene in which mise-en-scène works to tie Orlok to the medium of film occurs during one of Hutter’s nights in the castle, when Orlok comes into his room in order to feed on his blood. As Hutter is preparing for bed, he reads a passage in The Book of the Vampire that warns him of the vampire’s blood-sucking proclivities, foreshadowing what is yet to come. The camera then focuses in on the wall clock as it chimes midnight. Obviously frightened, Hutter moves over to the arched door of his room and opens it in order to look outside, presumably making sure he is safe from Orlok’s appetite that night. However, upon opening the door, Hutter
views the distant image of Orlok who is standing facing Hutter’s bedroom door. The camera shifts to a close-up of Orlok, who is framed against a white backdrop that is outlined with a darker shadow.

Hutter, astonished and frightened, runs to his bed for safety, leaving the door wide open. A subsequent shot shows the door swing open; Hutter cowers in the corner of his bed; and Orlok moves into yet another frame—this time that of the arched doorway into Hutter’s room.

20 Ibid, (30:26)
Orlok proceeds to move extremely slowly—closer and closer, all the while framed within the doorway. After an intercut sequence between Orlok praying on Hutter and Nina—who is at home and experiencing nightmares—there is again the image of Orlok framed in the doorway, this time he is leaving Hutter’s room.

When Orlok gets off the ship in London, he is again framed in a large archway, carrying his coffin of dirt.

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21 Ibid, (31:17)
22 Ibid, (33:38)
23 Ibid, (58:34)
The archways again act as screens within screens and draw attention to the parameters of the cinematic frame. In the scenes I have described, the viewer becomes aware of the filmic frame through which the story is being told. It is also curious, however, that the film is specifically prone to placing Count Orlok within frames. It is as though Orlok is magnetically attracted to both the iris shot and the mise-en-cinematic frame—effecting a connection between Orlok and the frame. One way to read this connection is to say that it is an attempt to tie the vampire to the medium of film. As I argued in Chapter 1, Stoker’s vampire appears to have much in common with the medium of cinema—aesthetically and thematically. Perhaps Murnau is picking up on this connection. However, in Nosferatu, this connection would seem to be a self-criticism—it would be a critique of the medium of cinema itself. Count Orlok is not the sexy, seductive and confident Dracula that Tod Browning premiered in his 1931 film—staring the now revered and canonical Bela Lugosi, as Dracula. By contrast, Murnau’s vampire seems to be creepy, sexually perverted (falling in line with Stoker’s novel) and ultimately pathetic. Trapped within his own ageing, decaying and skeletal body, Orlok is in no way a desirable character. So in this context, cinema seems to be not so much a sensual, exciting and entrancing modern feat—but a pathetic old man who should be dead and preys on younger, vulnerable and uninterested men and women. By tying Orlok to the medium of cinema, Murnau seems to be making a less than flattering comparison, and ultimately what seems to be a critique of the medium in which he is working.

**Filmic Voyeurism, Vampiric Voyeurism**

Murnau also accomplishes a heightened awareness of the filmic frame Murnau’s technique of using iris shots. Iris shots were frequently used in the silent era, including famous
director G.W. Griffith.\textsuperscript{24} These are images on screen that are circularly framed in negative black space—call to mind the image of an opening and closing camera lens. This awareness is evoked by the rounded iris shot but also by the circular perimeter surrounding the shot.

Similarly to the archways, the iris shot presents a frame inside the frame of the movie screen—a frame that makes viewers conscious that they are watching action take place on a finite screen. The iris shot makes the viewer aware of his or her limited mobility of sight and thus deference to the view of the camera lens. The film becomes meta-cinematic as the viewers become aware that they are watching the film—it is impossible to get lost in the film when the image on the screen represents the screen itself. Audiences of cinema constantly act as voyeurs—watching events take place of which they are not a part.

The iris shot also evokes the image of a watching eyeball or the viewer looking at the screen—in shape and name. Cinema is an inherently voyeuristic, and perhaps scopophilic medium, and the iris shot makes this quality apparent to any viewer. With the use of the iris shot,

\textsuperscript{24} Kuhn, Annette, and Westwell, Guy. “Silent Cinema.”
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, clockwise: (1:21:09), (19:55), (1:16:12), (30:09), (30:19)
viewers are more conscious than ever that they are watching—the framed image reflects their own eyeballs.

Murnau emphasizes the motif of the gaze by creating numerous scenes in which characters are watching and staring. Near the end of the film, when the “plague” of the vampire has overtaken the town, Nina looks out of her window down at a procession of coffins.

The sequence first focuses on the image of Nina looking through the window and then switches to depict what she is seeing—the street below. The second shot is framed as an iris shot, emphasizing the fact that the audience is viewing the street through Nina’s gaze. The sequence then switches again to depict Nina looking out of the window, orienting the viewer again. This sequence exemplifies the classic example of voyeurism. A character is looking out of a window from a safe distance; she can see everything but cannot be seen. Moreover, the events that Nina is watching are of a private matter: death and mourning—which is significant in that voyeurism is usually connected with seeing the private.

In keeping with the theme of cinematic voyeurism, in Nosferatu, desire is commonly revealed through the eyes. Orlok’s eyes are almost perpetually wide and unblinking and lined with eyeliner for emphasis.

26 Ibid, (1:12:56)
His eyes, rather than his body, are his tools for sexual interaction and demonstrations of lust and longing—there is no physical contact in the film. Orlok’s desiring gaze is directed at both at Nina and at Hutter. The first moment of over desire in the film comes when Orlok sees a photo of Nina that Hutter has brought with him to Castle Dracula.

In the scene, Hutter presents Count Orlok with paper concerning his purchase in London when Orlok suddenly spies a small photograph case on the table. A shot of Orlok looking closely at the case on the table morphs into an iris shot of the case. Here, the iris shot works to emphasize Orlok’s gaze.

He scoops up the case and holds it extremely close to his face—eyes bulging and unblinking. The sequence follows as Orlok looks at the photograph, looks at Hutter, looks at the photograph, and then back again at Hutter. “Is this your wife?/ What a lovely throat!” Orlok says, through the use of an inter-title. Looking back at the image again, still unblinking, Orlok hands the picture to Hutter. Hutter, of course, looks terrified the whole time—presumably because of Count’s overt fascination with his wife, and because of his suggestive comment. The sequence lasts 48 seconds. Orlok’s eyes are perpetually wide with lust and longing—the desire is communicated through his gaze.

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27 Ibid, (28:19)
Count Orlok’s lustful gaze when looking at Nina’s photo is the same one that spreads across his face when Hutter cuts his hand with a breadknife, soon after arriving at the castle. Hutter has unknowingly cut his hand and Orlok lifts his face ever so slightly above the top of his paper he is reading so that his just his shadowed, wide eyes and bushy eyebrows are the only part of his face visible.

The shot cuts back to Hutter who is terrified by Orlok’s reaction, as the clock chimes midnight. Realizing what he had done, Hutter pulls the knife out of his hand but is stopped by

28 Ibid, (Sequence starts at 28:20)
29 Ibid, (22:16)
Orlok who proceeds to get up and move closer and closer, causing Hutter get up from the table back away in terror.

**The Language of the Undead**

As has hopefully has been made clear, Count Orlok’s major vehicle for communicating is through his eyes—with which, more often than not, he communicates desire. A scene near the end of *Nosferatu*, again, depicts the idea of lust through sight again in an exchange between Count Orlok and Nina as they look across the street at one another. This communication is notable for its complexity and power. The scene begins with a medium shot of the Count, framed in the center of a window that is divided into nine panels. He gazes through the center panel, hands grasping the bars, as he stares directly at the camera.

The camera pauses on this image for a few seconds and then switches to a shot of Nina asleep in her bed. Through this juxtaposition of scenes, it is clear that Orlok is looking through his window into Nina and Hutter’s bedroom. Nina awakes suddenly (seemingly as a response to Orlok’s desiring gaze) and looks out of her window, across the street at Orlok, who is pictured in the same place—gazing out of his window, unmoving. Grabbing her heart, Nina, who seems to

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30 Skal mentions that this image of Orlok peering out his window is one of the most stunning of the formal elements in the film. (*Hollywood Gothic*, 54)
31 Ibid, left to right: (1:17:40), (1:18:11)
be in pain, walks toward her bedroom window with her arms out, as though in a trance. Orlok’s eyes bulge from across the street as Nina moves in front of the window, and he lifts his arms—fingers taught and reaching toward her. There is a moment when Nina seems to struggle to resist an exterior force compelling her to open the window. But the effort to resist seems to be too exhausting to bear and she finally cedes to his will—opening the window in a dramatic motion, spreading her arms and opening her chest to the darkness.

![Image](image.jpg)

Orlok, seeing his invitation, slowly turns and moves out of the frame, head turned and eyes fixed on Nina all the while. As a later scene confirms, he is coming to prey on her—an act to which Nina eventually submits, as the martyr of the film.

This exchange between Count Orlok and Nina demonstrates perhaps one of the most compelling moments in which the film focuses on the power of the gaze as a means of eliciting action. Orlok is able to use his gaze as a catalyst for contact with his desired object—Nina. And Orlok’s gaze is powerful enough to elicit action: his gaze wakes Nina from her sleep, causes her to feel what appears to be pain and guides her to move toward the window. Orlok’s gaze eventually causes Nina to submit to his desire. This vampiric language—a language through which the vampire is able to use the gaze alone in order to both communicate and will another to do its bidding—is what I will term “The Language of the Undead” throughout this paper. There

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32 Ibid, (1:18:16)
is one instance in which Stoker’s novel seems to present something similar to this type of communication—when Renfield recounts how Dracula has spoken to him from outside his cell walls, promising him blood if he submits to his will:

He held up his hand, and they all stopped; and I thought he seemed to be saying: ‘All these lives will I give you, ay, and many more and greater, through countless ages, if you fall down and worship me! And then a red cloud, like the colour of blood, seemed to close over my eyes; and before I knew what I was doing, I found myself opening the sash and saying to Him: ‘Come in, Lord and Master!’ (240)

I would suggest that here, we see Murnau taking the theme of non-verbal communication (including but not limited to hypnosis) from Stoker’s novel and using it for a meta-cinematic effect. Of course, in Stoker’s novel, hypnosis does not have the same effect of being meta-cinematic. In the novel, as I argued in Chapter 1, hypnosis acts as a kind of advanced, mysterious and magical language that is associated with Dracula as a way of further enhancing his mystical otherness. When used in film, this type of communication retains the effect of labeling Dracula as alien or “other,” but also additionally becomes (along with other types of visual communication) a meta-cinematic tool. In the three early films that I explore, the vampire will use versions of “The Language of the Undead.” According the Raymond Bellour, hypnosis seems to be inherent in vampiric communication. In his article “From Hypnosis to Animals,” Bellour says that there is an “implied hypnosis that emanates from the face of the vampire” (9).

But communication through the gaze, it seems, necessitates a certain type of gaze. In the scene where Nina and Orlok stare at one another from across the street, Orlok’s eyes stay wide, unblinking and fixed upon the window for the entirety of the scene. When Nina wakes, her eyes open wide as she stares at Orlok through her window. Looking at one another through the window, their eyes connect and this connection plays the part of speech—Orlok is able to

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33 I will return to this pertinent quote in later chapters.
communicate with Nina, and Nina able to understand him. But when Nina physically spreads her arms in front of the window, her body becomes the mode of communication. From her body language, Orlok understands that Nina is inviting him to take her blood—metaphorically to engage sexually with her. Nina’s stance resembles classical notions of Christ being crucified, as she sacrifices herself for the betterment of the town. She leans backward, with her arms spread wide, almost limp, as she stands there, waiting for her fate. Thus, the mode of communication shifts from the eyes to the sexualized body. Nina’s body language marks a different type of language and emphasizes what the viewer has been privy to throughout the whole film: that the vampire has no body language but instead relies on his gaze as his main mode of communication.

*Nosferatu* film posters from the time of release also reflect the importance of the vampire’s gaze.

In one (left) Orlok’s eyes seem to bulge out of his head and stare straight at the viewer. His eyes are ghostly and startingly white against his dark complexion. In the other, (right) Orlok’s eyes are similarly white and piercing, against the dark outline of his tall and lanky figure.

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34 Whitmore, Greg. “Dracula Film Posters: In Pictures”
In another poster, Nosferatu’s eyes emit beams of light as he stares into Nina’s bedroom window.

Skal makes the direct connection between Dracula’s eyes and the medium cinema:

One of Grau’s drawings for Nosferatu [above] … almost explicitly evokes film itself as demonic magic. Standing over a woman’s bed, the vampire illuminates his intended prey with beams of light projected from his eyes. The penetrating effect was not, unfortunately, used in the film. (80)

Stoker’s novel does draw attention to the vampire’s eyes—a theme that seems to have been picked up very heavily by early 20th century directors. In the novel, the eyes of vampires are often noted, and described as red, burning flaming. While Dracula is feeding on Mina’s blood, the vampire’s eyes “flamed red with devilish passion”(Stoker, 242). Earlier in the novel, the vampiric Lucy’s eyes are described similarly: “Lucy’s eyes in form and colour; but Lucy’s eyes unclean and full of hell-fire, instead of the pure, gentle orbs we knew… As she looked, her eyes blazed with unholy light”(Stoker, 181). So we can say that in some manner, the 1931 films are clearly drawing heavily from the original text. But the novel’s specific interest in the vampire’s eyes also assists in Nosferatu’s depiction of the vampiric language as one of sight.

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35 Skal, David. Hollywood Gothic, 45
Murnau’s Trickery

The eyes of the vampire are not the only ones that are of interest to Murnau—so too are the eyes of the viewers: As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Murnau seems to have been extremely interested in using cinema to play tricks on the eye. This was very common in early film as it was exciting as Gunning notes, it is clear that people went to see these films specifically for that technology that could produce those kinds of trick shots: “Early audiences went to exhibitions to see machines demonstrated (the newest technological wonder, following in the wake of such widely exhibited machines and marvels as X-rays or, earlier, the phonograph) rather than to view films” (Gunning, 383). Nosferatu seems to be no exception to the trend. Trick film (fantastic, unrealistic and impossible illusions that go against the laws of physics) makes the viewer aware that what he or she is viewing is only possible on screen through the medium of cinema. Thus, viewers are constantly being reminded that they are watching a film. But Murnau seems to have been determined to pack Nosferatu with all the tricks he can manage. Scholars have suggested that he even goes so far as to invent plot points. For example, Murphy suggests that the idea that the vampire is allergic to sunlight was conceived in Murnau’s film, for the sheer purpose of adding a technical effect. After Orlok spends the night with Nina, the sun comes up and he is turned into dust. Murnau “wanted to add another technical thrill to the film,” says Murphy (9). “Nowhere in legend is the vampire so susceptible to sunlight,” (9) he notes. The idea of Orlok as somehow allergic to the light builds on Laner’s proposition that the figure of the vampire serves as an analogy for the only medium that thrives in the dark but cannot be seen in the light.

Other trick film techniques include the scene in the beginning of the film when Hutter rides to Count Orlok’s castle and the carriage moves at what seems like twice a normal speed. The scene is also shot in the negative, which, as Murphy notes, gives it an “eerie atmosphere” (6).
On the boat to England, Orlok defies gravity as he slowly rises out of his coffin, like a diagonal Jack in the Box. On the same ship, he appears and disappears into thin air.

A Horror Film Without Trying

In *Nosferatu*, the idea of film is not presented in a sexy, desirable and entrancing light, as seems common in popular culture. Instead, it is something terrifyingly threatening. The film’s meta-cinematic effects, in turn, serve to draw attention to the medium, a very new medium at the time that *Nosferatu* was released. Like in Stoker’s novel, one of the aims of this film, I would argue, is make a statement about the threat that is modernity—specifically the threat that is the emergence of newer media to the old, known media. Rather than it being seen as a new, exciting phenomenon, film, as it is depicted in *Nosferatu*, is a dangerous medium that attempts to overshadow and possibly extinguish the reliable media that had served the needs of storytellers for centuries. The film accomplishes this message by alluding to the threat over and over again and associating it with the horrifying and threatening figure of Stoker’s Dracula.

However, it is notable that Orlok (a symbol for film) additionally embodies a perverse, pitiful and creepy persona. Orlok is specifically not the sexy, confidant heartthrob that Bela Lugosi will portray on screen a decade later. Thus, in addition to being terrified by the prospect of a blood-sucking undead being, the viewer also presumably feels slightly sorry of the poor, hideous, unwanted and unloved vampire who is trapped within his own undead being. So, although Murnau depicts film as horrifying and a threat to early 20th century society, he also associates it with a pathetic creature. Murnau seems to be saying that perhaps film is not so all mighty and infallible after all—perhaps there is hope for society still.

In the next Chapter, I will discuss the next decade’s filmic take on Stoker’s novel, its
vampire, and the medium of film—as it changes and begins to create a legacy for itself.
Chapter 3: 
Dracula and Drácula

“[Vampires] promise escape from our dull lives and the pressure of our times, but they matter because when properly understood they make us see that our lives are implicated by theirs and our times are inescapable.”

—David Skal, 113

The year 1931 saw the death of F.W. Murnau; but it also saw a glimpse into the innumerable Dracula adaptations yet to come. Tod Browning’s 1931 production is undoubtedly the most famous in the litany of Dracula adaptations, and its star, Bela Lugosi, the most memorable and influential of Dracula personages. Unlike Prana, Universal Studios legally obtained rights to the film—through buying the rights to Stoker’s novel as well as three stage-plays based on it. The film was, in fact, based on one such stage play, and written and first performed in 1924 by Hamilton Dean and John L. Balderson (Skal). The play was very successful—“the play instantly caught alight and later, in the same year—leaving the London productions still happily running—Deane sent out three simultaneous tours”(Riley, 10). It eventually toured across United States and Canada as well and earned more than two and a half million dollars. (Riley, 32) The film that it yielded, which has since attained legendary status, was also a major success upon its first run. In a New York Times review, critic Mourdant Hall called Browning’s production “best of the many mystery films.” The film also aimed to be international—a Spanish language version, Drácula, directed by George Melford (who worked through a translator) and starring Carlos Villaria, used the same script and was filmed on the same set, at night.

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36 In his book Hollywood Gothic, David Skal notes that Browning’s Dracula was the most successful picture of 1931” (Hollywood Gothic, 38)
37 Lugosi also played the part of Dracula in the theatrical production.
38 Hall, Mourdant. “THE SCREEN; Bram Stoker's Human Vampire”
This chapter will look at the ways these two films draw from Stoker’s *Dracula*, how they and deviate from *Nosferatu* and how they contribute to the *Dracula’s* cinematic legacy. It will propose that these films, in effect, are actually very similar to their 1922 predecessor in their meta-cinematic effects and the way they aesthetically communicate these effects. In other aspects, however, the films are very different from *Nosferatu*, from each other and from the novel. But one striking similarity between all three is that they all seem to have a very specific interest in alternative modes of communication that rely on the power of sight\(^39\)—quality that turns out to be extremely meta-cinematic. In this chapter, I will look at the two 1931 films and discuss the very acute awareness they seem to possess regarding their own medium—in other words, I will discuss their qualities of being meta-cinematic. I will also describe the awareness the films seem to have regarding their own history, and I will discuss how they aim to contribute to that history.

**Film Feeding on Film: Back to the 1920s**

But because there is such a paucity of scenes in Stoker’s novel that actually demonstrate or describe the act of hypnosis, I will suggest that the two 1931 adaptations of *Dracula* looked largely to Murnau’s 1922 production for its hypnosis—a category that encompasses “The Language of the Undead.” In this way, the films seem to be performing a type of intra-medial incorporation (as opposed to Laner’s theory of intermedial incorporation in *Nosferatu.*) Like Stoker’s Dracula himself, the adaptations take fuel and sustenance from the old. This type of incorporation within a relatively new medium holds a lot of gravity. To use the vampire analogy—Browning and Melford seem to be feeding off of earlier cinema. In citing an earlier

\(^{39}\) “The Language of the Undead,” discussed in Chapter 2, falls under this category.
work of film, the two 1931 adaptations work to legitimize their relatively new medium. By 1931, there had already been an adaptation of *Dracula*, on which the directors of the new adaptations are able to build. But similarly to any adaptation that has its basis in another work, the 1931 films’ building upon a tradition may have been necessary. In order for audiences to accept their films as part of the filmic cannon of *Dracula* adaptations, Browning and Melford needed to contribute and add to their audience’s understanding of what has already been done in its adaptation.\(^{40}\) In 1922, Murnau created the possibility of a legacy for Stoker’s *Dracula* story to be portrayed in film and the 1931 films add to that legacy by reflecting on their own technology. But their “feeding off” of earlier Dracula adaptations also has significance for the entire medium of film. When *Nosferatu* was filmed, cinema had only been around for just over two decades. But the explosion of film in the early 20\(^{th}\) century created a legitimate legacy in a very short amount of time. The fact that there was another script written to adapt Stoker’s *Dracula* within just a decade, speaks to the rapidity with which film took off.

There also seems to be a social awareness forming that cinema is becoming a legitimate form of art and communication. A March 30 1930 *New York Times* article reads:

> There is an intelligence and talent gathering in Hollywood as it never gathered before. It is most hopeful, most promising. The talkies offer a new style, much more interesting to work in ... I believe that some day they will assume proportions as an art form as great as Anglo Saxon literature. I really do.\(^ {41}\)

Both the English-language and Spanish-language versions put an incredible amount of emphasis on both the theme of hypnosis and on the image of eyes. This emphasis, I will suggest, is in response to references to hypnosis in Stoker’s novel; but the films also seem to be in direct

\(^{40}\) It is important to note, however, that both the Spanish and English-language versions of the 1931 Universal film were produced off of the same script. So the script itself seems to be drawing from *Nosferatu*—it is not a conscious choice of Browning’s and Melford’s.

\(^{41}\) Qtd. in *Hollywood Gothic*, 164
dialogue with their 1922 predecessor. Scholars have come to assume that the script for the 1931 films do indeed draw from Murnau’s film due to the fact that there exists an almost identical scene in both that has no basis in the novel.42

There are multiple scenes in the 1931 films that are extremely similar to the scene in Nosferatu, in which the vampire and Nina partake in a performance of nonverbal communication, and non-verbal hypnosis (what I term “The Language of the Undead” on the part of the vampire). Many of these reincarnated scenes in the 1931 films do indeed fall under the category of the “The Language of the Undead”—in which silent communication occurs.

Other scenes, however, make use of the new medium of sound film and portray a vocalized hypnosis that appears much like conventional scientific hypnosis. Why, then, in a script for a sound film, does the screenwriter choose to portray silent hypnosis? Why did the technology of sound film not do away with portrayals of silent communication? It is not necessary and it is, to say the least, perplexing for the viewer to watch. It is very probable that screenwriter of the 1931 films, Garret Fort, found the scene of “The Language of the Undead” in Nosferatu to be especially provocative—and so reproduced iterations of it time and time again in the 1931 script. So why was this scene so gripping? As I argued in Chapter 2, the scene in Nosferatu can be read as a direct reference to and commentary on cinema—a medium that until the early 1930s was silent. Directors were forced to rely on images alone to communicate their messages; and the eye, rather than both the ear and the eye, the mode through which they were able to communicate. Thus, “The Language of the Undead,” a language communicated through sight alone, as it was first presented in this scene in Nosferatu, was understandably very potent for film to think about itself and its own medium. The 1931 films seem to be taking advantage of

42 The scene in which Jonathan cuts himself when he first dines at Castle Dracula appears in both the 1922 and 1931 adaptations, yet has no basis in the novel.
its potency. But in directly taking from the 1922 film, the Browning and Melford films are also engaging in a dialogue about their own history. By referring to their predecessors, they note where they came from and where they are going.

While multiple scenes in the 1931 films are extremely reminiscent of the scene in *Nosferatu*, they go further in complicating and developing the aesthetic and process of “The Language of the Undead.” The 1931 films make the vampiric language even more distinct, increasingly supernatural, and, at times, seemingly superior to human language. In *Nosfreatu*, Orlok does not perform the conventional vocalized hypnosis—he wills another to do his bidding through the use of sight. In Browning’s adaptation, depictions of alternative modes of communication are variable. Some portray a vocalized hypnosis; some exemplify an advanced “Language of the Undead;” and some are a combination of both. The fact that the vampire is able to perform various forms of hypnotic communication, however, makes him seem all the more powerful. But because of the way that the script (and its resulting films) jump from silent to vocalized hypnosis, to a mixture of both, it also seems as if the screenwriter and directors were merely trying things out. There is a sense that the filmmakers were groping and experimenting with the uncertainty that still defined the new medium.

It is intriguing, however, that scenes of silent hypnosis are written into a script for sound film. One might assume that the new technology would cause screenwriters to attempt to incorporate as much sound in the film as possible. Skal does mention that the English version of the film is oddly quiet; Browning was a veteran of the silent age. But even more interesting than the moments lacking in both diotic and non-diogetic sound, is the fact that the script is still interested in these moments of silent hypnosis (“The Language of the Undead”). The screenplay seems to be both taking from the history of film in these scenes of silent hypnosis; but it is also
interested in contributing to the legacy of this ever-growing and ever-legitimizing medium. And *Dracula*, a novel that is incredibly interested in thinking about modernity, is the perfect vehicle through which these films are able to think about the past and future of their medium.

**Hypnotizing the Female Servant**

There are two scenes in both of the 1931 films in which Dracula engages in hypnosis with women (an usherette and a nurse); and although each have the same shooting script, the films present notably different depictions of the scenes, although the Spanish-language version remains slightly more faithful to the script. Skal notes the Spanish-language version’s tendency to remain true to the original script: “The Spanish version of *Dracula* follows the original shooting script far more carefully than the American film, enhancing its visual suggestions rather than undermining them”(216).

The first scene of hypnosis in the 1931 script is written as nonverbal—a silent communication between Dracula and the usherette when the vampire arrives at the theater. This scene is nowhere in the novel—it is completely original to the 1931 productions.

C-10 INT. PASSAGE BACK OF BOX  
Curtains shut off front of box—a single light is burning dimly near the wall-rack for coats.  
Dracula and usherette have come in—he is handing her his hat—as she looks up at him—

C-11 INT. FLASH CLOSEUP USHERETTE  
Looking up at Dracula—her eyes become suddenly fixed—then her arms, raised to receive his cloak, fall slowly to her sides.

C-12 INT. FLASH BOX  
The party listening to music, which is reaching a crescendo.

C-13 INT. PASSAGE  
Dracula has moved closer to the usherette, and is now removing his cloak, his eyes still on hers, as he says as if in contemplation of something he has been telling her,

Dracula: —and the message delivered, you will remember nothing—
Usherette nods slowly—Dracula goes on removing his cloak—usherette turns to box. In this scene, both the English and Spanish-language films deviate from the shooting script. In the Spanish-language version, as the usherette is hanging up the coat and hat, Dracula stares at her back. Seeming to sense his gaze, the usherette turns around slowly and stares at the Count. There is an extreme close-up of Dracula’s eyes, filling the frame.

The camera then switches to a medium shot of the pair and Dracula verbally instructs the maid of what to do.

The English-language version, however, depicts the scene same scene as entirely vocalized. Dracula and the usherette stand facing each other in a medium shot; Dracula commands the usherette: “And after you deliver the message, you will remember nothing you

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43 Riley, Philip J, “Original Shooting Script”
44 Melford, George, (1931) Drácula, (25:41)
45 Browning, Tod, (1931) Dracula, (24:06)
46 Melford, George, (1931) Drácua, (25:45)
now say.” The camera then focuses on a close-up of Dracula’s eyes—wide and staring—and switches back to the medium shot. “Obey,” he says. The nurse exits.

Meanwhile, the hypnosis scene between Dracula and the maid is written in the script as vocalized:

**G-33 INT. MINA’S BOUDOIR LARGE CLOSEUP NURSE**

Staring into camera. Dracula’s voice comes over closeup:

Dracula’s voice:
From now on, you will carry out any suggestion that reaches you through my brain. When I will you to do something, it shall be done!

... 

Nurse: (In a dead, monotonous tone) It shall be done.

Dracula: When you awake you will not remember what I say. Do you hear me?

Nurse: (As before) I hear you

Dracula: You have received your orders. Obey!

Nurse mechanically turns, exiting thru door into bedroom. Dracula follows her thru door, CAMERA FOLLOWING. Dracula halts just inside doorway—shooting past him we see nurse cross to the bed. Dracula raises his arm and muffles his face in his cloak.

The Spanish-language version remains faithfully true to the script. Dracula and the nurse’s dialogue is a direct Spanish translation (1:16:53). The scene begins with a close-up shot of the maid’s face, looking off to the edge of the screen from where Dracula’s arm is extended and positioned in a grasping gesture towards her forehead. The maid stares upward (presumably at Drácula’s face), eyes wide and unblinking. Drácula and the maid engage in a dialogue that is translated very similarly to the script. The maid repeats what Drácula says in a monotone, all the while blankly staring up into his crazed eyes. When he has finished giving her instructions,
Drácula then points his finger at the door of Eva’s room and the maid proceeds to open the door, allowing Drácula to walk inside. The maid takes away the vampire-repelling plant from Eva’s pillow and leaves the room. Drácula moves towards Eva, arms outstretched and grasping at her face. The scene comes to a close.

The English version of this scene does not exist.

**Hypnotizing the Vampire**

“The Language of the Undead” continues in the screenplay’s only hypnosis scene that also occurs in the novel—the scene in which Dracula nonverbally communicates with Renfield, while the later is trapped within the confines of Dr. Seward’s mental institution. In the novel, the reader is only privy to the scene after-the-fact, when Renfield, on the verge of death, recounts it for Van Helsing, accompanied by a few of the other vampire hunters:

> He held up his hand, and they all stopped; and I thought he seemed to be saying: ‘All these lives will I give you, ay, and many more and greater, through countless ages, if you fall down and worship me! And then a red cloud, like the colour of blood, seemed to close over my eyes; and before I knew what I was doing, I found myself opening the sash and saying to Him: ‘Come in, Lord and Master!’”

(Stoker, 240)

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47 In the Spanish-language version, Mina is renamed Eva.
48 Melford, George. *Drácula* (1931), left: (1:17:08), right: (1:17:10)
This is the only scene in the novel in which Dracula’s communication seems to fall into the category of “The Language of the Undead.” Dracula is not verbalizing his thoughts, but Renfield seems to be able to understand him completely. Furthermore, Dracula is able to wield power over Renfield—he is able to make him do certain actions. This is the only scene like it in the novel but it seems to have had a great influence on film adaptations.

The 1931 script, however, presents the scene in live action and the effect is chilling:

**G-15 EXT. CLOSEUP DRACULA**

He is staring up at Renfield—eyes commanding, his whole attitude one of determination, as if he were sending an intense mysterious message to Renfield. (Shooting Script—Dracula (1931))

**G-16 EXT. CLOSEUP WINDOW**

Shooting into room. Renfield sinks back a little into the room and exclaims in low, horrified tones,

Renfield: No, no master—please—Not her—not again

**G-17 EXT. VERY CLOSEUP DRACULA**

As he draws himself up, silent anger—his eyes threatening—his whole attitude indicating that he is projecting a terrific mental force towards Renfield

**G-18 INT. RENFIELD’S ROOM CLOSE SHOT RENFIELD**

His hands are gripping the bars of the window more fiercely then ever. His head lowered as if he were trying to avoid contact with Dracula, his eyes roving restlessly about the floor, like a trapped animal as he whispers fervishly:

Renfield: Please—please—Master! Please don’t!\(^49\)

This scene is played out very similarly in both the Spanish and English-language versions of the film—they follow the dialogue in the script. The only notable difference seems to be that in the English version, Renfield is awakened by a wolf’s howl; while in the Spanish version, he is awakened by a bat’s shriek. The visual language in this scene harkens back, yet again, Orlok’s silent communication with Nina in *Nosferatu*. But the amount of detail and nuance communicated presents a direct diversion from the scene in Murnau’s film. In the 1931 versions,

\(^{49}\) Riley, Philip J, “Original Shooting Script”
Dracula is able to communicate a very advanced message to Renfield. He is not merely willing him to do something in the present but giving him specific instructions for the future. The language is also extremely specific—Dracula is able to give, and Renfield is able to understand very detailed directions for a future that is not immediately apparent. This is in contrast to the other moments in the 1931 films in which Dracula either vocalizes his orders and/or is speaking about something immediately apparent (giving directions that the subjects should follow immediately). This is the only scene in the 1931 films in which Dracula is able to fully communicate complex and nuanced thoughts and instructions by solely using “The Language of the Undead.” And Renfield seems to be able to understand his language word-for-word. In other scenes of hypnosis, Dracula either uses a combination of hypnosis and “The Language of the Undead,” or relays very simplistic messages, such as desire. But here, Dracula actually seems to be talking—using syntax.

The kind of language that Dracula uses in this scene is what philosopher Susan Langer might term “symbolic language” in her work, “Language and Thought.” In the piece, she differentiates between symbolic and signifying language. Langer claims that while signs are used to announce or make reference to something that is present, such as an animals’ howl or a bark to communicate danger, symbols, like written language or spoken words or phrases, are used to bring to mind something that is not immediately present. She suggests that while humans use both signs and symbols, animals can solely make use of signs—this, Langer says, is what makes human language different and distinct from that of other animals. Langer accepts that symbolic language may not be verbal: “Language need not be vocal; it may be purely visual, like written language, or even tactual, like the deaf-mute system of speech; but it must be denotative”(2). The type of “Language of the Undead” that Dracula uses in this scene is interesting specifically
because it is definitely denotative—and more than that—it is complex. But it is not clear whether
it is a sign or a symbol. The language itself does not seem to be signifying anything. There is no
possibility that anyone who is watching the film can understand what Dracula is saying because
there is no apparent syntactical structure or denotative signs that he is even communicating. Yet,
it is clear that Renfield understands him very well. This scene represents the pinnacle of The
Language of the Undead’s complexity in these three films. Perhaps it is because of the fact that
Dracula is speaking to another vampire that this extremely advanced silent-linguistic feat—the
most advanced in the novel and the films—is able to take place.

Renfield later recounts what happened to Van Helsing in a soliloquy that heavily takes
from the language in the novel:

G-35 INT. LIBRARY
Van Helsing is saying to Renfield,

VAN HELSING: You know where these boxes are, Renfied! Tell us—and we’ll protect you—

RENFIELD: But I don’t need your protection! The Master isn’t angry with me—he’s pleased. He came and stood below my window in the moonlight, and he promised me things—not in words but by doing them—

VAN HELSING: Doing them—?

G-35 CONTINUED

RENFIELD: By making them happen—

He starts to explain with crazy enthusiasm,

—a red mist spread over the lawn, coming on like a flame—and then he parted it an I could see that there were thousands of rats, with their eyes blazing red like this, only smaller! He held up his hand and they all stopped; and I thought he seemed to be saying, Rats—rats—rats—thousands, million of them—and every one a life—all red blood—years of life in it: All these will I give you—aye, and may more and greater, through ages, if you will obey me!

50 Presumably a typo in the shooting script
51 Riley, Philip J, “Original Shooting Script”
It is intriguing that, in a script that deviates so extensively from its source material and cuts down on a large number of scenes, nuances and characters, that an entire speech from that same source material would be transplanted into it. The wording in the shooting script varies, although the entire sentiment of the passage stays the same. However, one phrase is identical in both: “He held up his hand and they all stopped; and I thought he seemed to be saying” (Stoker, 240). This phrase is notable for two reasons, both regarding the ability of the vampire to communicate via inhuman modes of communication. It exemplifies the ability for the vampire to speak to communicate with animals: “He held up his hand and they [the rats] all stopped,” demonstrating, yet again, the vampire’s ability to utilize an alternate form of communication. But the phrase is also a prime example of “The Language of the Undead;” By simply holding up his hand, Dracula is able to communicate. This communication typifies the more advanced instructions and thoughts that Dracula is able to communicate in the 1931 adaptations, as compared to the 1922.

The aesthetics of this scene in both films are also the most similar to the aesthetics in the Nosferatu scene in which Count Orlok nonverbally communicates to Nina from across the street. All three scenes (the two 1931 Renfield-Dracula dialogue scenes, and the one in Nosferatu in which Count Orlok uses “The Language of the Undead” to communicate with Nina from across the street) contain the image of a character looking through checkered bars. In Chapter 2, I argued that this aesthetic element in the 1922 film was incredibly interesting in looking thinking about meta-cinema in Nosferatu—the bars create multiple smaller screens within a screen—creating an added awareness that the film is taking place onscreen. The same is true in the 1931 films:
Hypnotizing the Scientist

The scene in which Dracula performs a version of hypnosis on Dr. Van Helsing is the only scene in the films in which the hypnosis seems to be unsuccessful.

G-51 INT. LIBRARY MED. SHOT
Van Helsing is facing Dracula across the table—has worked himself up to a dramatic pitch, as he levels his finger at Dracula and cries,

Van Helsing: --and I’ll have Carfax Abbey torn down, stone by stone—excavated for a mile around!

G-52 INT. FLASH CLOSEUP VAN HELSING
His voice rising and continuing through closeup..

Van Helsing: —I’ll find your hiding place and in the bright glare of sunlight you dread, I’ll rip the cover from your earth-box and drive that stake through your heart!

G-53 FLASH CLOSEUP OF DRACULA
Reacting to his throat—his eyes narrow ominously. He does not speak for a moment and directs a piercing gaze toward Van Helsing—he seems about to burst forth in fierce speech—then, controlling himself with mighty effort, and his voice taking on a smooth, silky quality, he purrs,

Dracula: In the past five hundred years, Van Helsing, those who have crossed my path have all died—

G-54 INT. MED. SHOT VAN HELSING & DRACULA
Dracula is f.g., his back to camera; Van Helsing facing him.

Dracula: (completing speech) —and some not pleasantly.

52 Browning, Tod. Dracula (1931), (37:19)
53 Melford, George. Drácula (1931), (1:13:04)
We see Van Helsing’s shoulders stiffen and he braces himself against this threat. Dracula continues looking at him with fierce intensity—then slowly lifts his arm and says, with terrible emphasis and force,

Dracula: Come—here—!

G-55 INT. FLASH CLOSEUP VAN HELSING
Standing very straight and rigid—all his mental faculties whipped into play to combat this sudden danger.

G-56 INT. FLASH CLOSEUP DRACULA
Matching action as me completes speech and concentrates his entire will-power on Van Helsing, his eyes growing large.

G-57 INT. MED SHOT ANOTHER ANGLE
Both men hold their positions for a moment, unbending—Van Helsing, fighting to maintain his defensive position. Then he takes an involuntary step toward Dracula, which is followed by a slight pause as he attempts to gain control of himself. Dracula tightens up, baffled for a moment, then says,

Dracula: Your will is strong—then I must come to you—

He takes a couple of slow steps toward Van Helsing, never once removing his eyes from Van Helsing’s.

G-58 ARGER CLOSEUP OF VAN HELSING
His hand flies quickly to his vest pocket—this move is instantly checked by Dracula’s voice sounding authoritatively over Closeup.

Dracula’s Voice: Stop!

Van Helsing’s hand stops.

G-59
Bringing all his will to bear on Van Helsing, he says,

Dracula: You cannot move your hand until I will it.54

54 Riley, Philip J, “Original Shooting Script”
Both the English and Spanish-language versions stay relatively true to the shooting script. In both, Van Helsing appears to at first cede to the vampire’s hypnosis, but then resists—eventually taking action to fend him off.

In the Spanish-language version, the scene begins as Drácula and Van Helsing are engaged in a discussion; Drácula is threatening Van Helsing with the loss of lives. He then extends his hand toward Van Helsing’s face, and the doctor moves back, horrified. The camera’s upward angle (as shown in the fig. for footnote 55) creates the impression that Drácula is in a position of power. He says, “Venga aqui. No moveras tu mano hasta yo quiero.” (“Come here. Do not move your hand until I want you to.”) Van Helsing moves towards Drácula as if he is in a trance—never taking his eyes away from the Count’s face. Drácula tells Van Helsing to take what he has “there” (the cross in his jacket pocket) and put it in the box on the table. Drácula hides his face as Van Helsing takes it out of his pocket. But then, Van Helsing comes out of his apparent hypnotic state\(^{55}\) and seems to regain a sense of autonomy and seemingly with ease and immediately turns against his hypnotizer. He then tricks Drácula, closing the box loudly, so it seems like he has put the cross in it, and retains it in his hand. Drácula, thinking he is safe, uncovers his eyes only to see Van Helsing holding the cross directly in front of his face. Drácula screams and recoils as he sees it and then exists.

The English version is very similar. “Come here,” Dracula says. Van Helsing stays where he is. Dracula holds up his hand in a claw-like grip and extends it toward Van Helsing: “Come here.” Van Helsing moves a few steps forward—seemingly by force—but then moves back as though he has finally willed himself not resist the vampire’s power. “Your will is strong, Van

\(^{55}\) It is not clear whether Van Helsing was ever successfully hypnotized or whether he was acting.

Eyes on the Prize

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, hypnosis is a prominent aspect in the later part of Stoker’s novel. It is one of the techniques through which the vampire is able to access his victims, and in turn, it is a mechanism through which the vampire hunters access him. The art of hypnosis is presented as a scientific technology—one that works to associate Dracula with the modern era and also serves to associate the vampire hunters’ mission with those of the modern scientific community. The result is that hypnosis adds to the overtones of modernity already well embedded within the novel. But even with the seemingly vast number of hypnosis references that the novel makes, the novel never specifically describes the process of hypnosis, as it is occurring. The majority of hypnosis scenes detail Van Helsing hypnotizing Mina in order to get clues as to Dracula’s whereabouts. There is one scene in the novel in which Renfield describes an instance

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56 Browning, Tod. *Dracula* (1931), (59:46)
57 Melford, George, *Drácula* (1931), (1:25:51)
in which Dracula has performed something like hypnosis on him.\textsuperscript{58} There is also an instance in the novel in which Dracula appears to hypnotize Jonathan and Mina in order to feed on the latter and prevent Jonathan from stopping him: “On the bed beside the window lay Jonathan Harker, his face flushed, and breathing heavily as though in a stupor”\textsuperscript{(Stoker, 242). Mina describes her experience: “I took the sleeping draught, which you had so kindly given me, but for a long time it did not act, I seemed to become more wakeful and myriads of horrible fancies began to crowd in upon my mind—all of them connected with death, and vampires; with blood and pain and trouble”\textsuperscript{(Stoker, 245). The 1931 Universal productions, however, are extremely interested in portraying the vampire as the enactor of hypnosis and his victims as his subjects. The films do this through scenes that explicitly suggest the act of hypnosis but also through an attention to the vampire’s gaze—numerous shots in the film pause on the vampire’s eyes: wide and staring.

\textsuperscript{58} This scene, referred to in Chapter 2 (Page 21), will be the only hypnosis scene in 1931 films that is directly taken from the novel. It is also the closest that the novel gets to describing the process of hypnosis.

\textsuperscript{59} Browning, Tod. \textit{Dracula}, (1931). Clockwise: (7:43), (19:17), (15:12), (19:30), (24:14)
The importance that the eyes to hold in the two 1931 films seem to draw from both their 1922 predecessor and Stoker’s novel itself. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, Stoker’s novel does draw attention to the vampire’s eyes—a theme that seems to have been picked up very heavily by early 20th century directors. So we can say that in some manner, the 1931 films are clearly drawing heavily from the original text, as well as from Nosferatu. The next section will attempt to detail and account for the extent to which the 1931 films draw from Murnau’s.

The image of eyes—in both films—are routinely highlighted and associated with the vampire as a mechanism for expressing desire. The films regularly portray the vampires with wide-open and manic eyes. This specific gaze is always associated with “The Language of the Undead;” the vampire uses this gaze in order to facilitate his hypnosis. But this gaze is present throughout both films and the camera draws attention to it. Close-ups of wide, staring eyes are used in order to suggest the vampire’s lust for blood but also insanity. The directional language

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in the shooting script and the dialogue in the films reflect this interest in and attention to the image of the vampire’s eyes.

From the first image that we get of the vampire, his eyes emphasized as distinctly frightening and insane. As we know from the novel, the coachman who takes Jonathan to Castle Dracula is indeed the Count himself and the 1931 screenplay makes it very clear that there is something eerie about his gaze:

**A-21 EXT. CLOSE SHOT DRIVER**

Shooting up from Renfield’s point of view. He is almost completely hidden in the folds of his great cloak, and has a hat pulled down over his face so that nothing of him is visible save for a pair of bright, almost feverish, eyes. He nods in reply to Renfield’s uncertain words, and without speaking, indicates that Renfield is to get in the coach.⁶¹

The description of Dracula’s eyes as “bright” and “feverish” is emblematic of the way vampiric eyes are depicted in the 1931 films and shows that the screenplay consciously highlights this. This scene also demonstrates the camera work that is used to emphasize the image of the vampiric eyes: the “CLOSE SHOT DRIVER” description of the EXT. indicates a focus on the eyes. It will become more apparent throughout the film that the camera is very interested in following and highlighting the absurd, evil, effervescent eyes of the vampire.

⁶¹ Riley, Philip J, “Original Shooting Script” 
⁶² Browning, Tod. *Dracula*, (1931), (07:43) 
⁶³ Melford, George. *Drácula*, (1931), (07:54)
In both films, the vampire’s eyes become a subject of interest from the beginning of the film—when he first meets Renfield in the entrance to Castle Dracula. The screenplay describes Dracula’s eyes: “luminous eyes burn with an unholy light, and upon closer inspection can be identified with those of the mysterious driver of the coach.”64 Again, the reference to light in the Count’s eyes suggests that Fort was thinking about the vampire’s eyes as an important aspect to consider.

Dracula is the first character in the film to exhibit this quality, but Renfield also assumes this gaze when he becomes a vampire. The first time we are witness this new and striking quality of his gaze is on the ship en route to England:

**B-7 INT. COMPANIONWAY FLASH CLOSEUP DRACULA**

Coming slowly up towards camera, his eyes bestial and predatory—comes up into huge closeup—as we—

DISOLVE TO:

**B-8 EXT. CLOSE SHOT IN RIGGING**

A sailor clings there, half mad, staring down at deck with insane eyes—sees Dracula appear, and throwing back his head in a burst of maniacal laughter, drops out of sight into the surging seas …65

The scene plays out in the Spanish-language version as it is written in the shooting script, but does not appear in the English version at all. In the English version, this scene is replaced by one in which Renfield, crouching on the floor, looks up at his master who towers above him and asks him to give him lives.

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65 Riley, Philip J, “Original Shooting Script”
When Mina gets bitten, she too comes to display these wild, crazy eyes as she looks upon Jonathan right before she bites him.
The vampire’s gaze, as depicted by these three characters, always seems to be associated with a sexualized desire. In all of these instances, this hungry, yearning gaze is used when vampires come into contact with their prey. This quality of the gaze, present in both films, most likely also takes from the scene in *Nosferatu* that provides so much material for these films: the scene in which Orlok and Nina stare at each other from across the street. That scene is overtly one of desire—Count Orlok is, in essence, asks Nina (through “The Language of the Undead”) to allow him to imbibe her blood. Orlok’s act of sucking Nina’s blood, though, is ultimately a sexualized desire and sexualized act. The sexualized undertone comes directly from the novel’s descriptions of the Count feeding on Mina:

> With his left hand he [Dracula] held both Ms. Harker’s hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man’s bare breast which was shown by his torn-open dress. (Stoker, 242)

It is clear that the vampire’s crazed gaze in the 1931 films also communicate desire—and often a sexualized desire. Mina looks longingly at her fiancé before biting him; Renfield perpetually assumes a crazed expression in his eyes when he thinks about or asks smaller animals to sustain his life. Dracula looks longingly at his soon-to-be victims. It is clear that eyes, in all three films,

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68 Browning, Tod. *Dracula* (1931), (1:02:45)
69 Melford, George. *Drácula* (1931), (1:29:34)
act as symbols and outlets for vamipric desire. This way of thinking about the eyes as a mode of desire can be thought of in the sense of film in the audience’s desire to have what is on screen—desire for what is advertised, desire for the sensuality taking place on screen). Stoker’s Dracula, at its core, is a story about desire—this seems to be a theme that is easily translatable to the screen—and relatable to the medium of film.

What is it Like to Be a Vampire?

In his essay “What is it like to be a bat?” Thomas Nagel frames the problem of other minds with the example of thinking about, as the title of the piece suggests, what it is like to be a bat. Nagel argues that the problem is one of point of view and subjectivity—that is, we (as humans) can all think about and try to create an image for ourselves of what it is like to be a bat. But the reality is that we will never know what it is like for a bat to be a bat. Nagel then suggests various methods of understanding this notion—without actually being a bat. The problem of understanding the vampire can be termed in a similar fashion: what is it like to be a vampire?—with the conclusion being that we may never know. Stoker, for one, makes it distinctly difficult for the reader to understand Dracula’s subjectivity—as the vampire’s voice or thoughts are never written into the novel. In the novel—because of its form as a series of letters from the vampire hunters to one another—the reader gets no access into Dracula’s thoughts. Dracula is a character that is described to the reader but he himself never speaks—so the reader only gets a depiction of him through other characters’ eyes. But the films also do a good job of creating a mysterious aura around the vampire, especially through his gaze. Eyes are often referred to as the “window into the soul” and the vampire’s seem to be especially telling. A fantastic figure that has pervaded folkloric stories, the vampire is a mysterious, even unknowable figure. It represents a
different form of life from anything in the known world—not quite human and not quite animal—the vampire also has an interiority that remains a mystery. So in the subsequent film adaptations, it seems as though the vampire’s eyes are a mode through which the audience can then try to understand the vampire’s interiority. But in these three films, Dracula’s eyes—vacant, wide and staring—seem just as empty as image of Dracula’s interiority in the novel. The vampire’s eyes suggest that there is something about vampiric desire that is incomprehensible to humans. It is a level of interiority that humans have never experienced, and thus something that we may not ever be able to fully understand. There is something hollow about the vampire’s stare that has no significance to viewers of the film because the audience cannot possibly grasp the concept of what it is like to be a vampire. In following with the analogy of the vampire as cinema, what, then, can we say about cinema’s gaze? It seems as though this new medium is just as mysterious as the undead count. The cinematic screen is an abyss waiting to be defined: a looming, possibly horrifying task that will be made society’s work for years to come.
Conclusion

What does it mean, then, that these films seem to be so interested and invested in thinking about their own medium? This is the question we must ask ourselves, after acknowledging the fact that these films are meta-cinematic. The first, and, possibly most obvious answer to this question is that these films come at a very important time for cinema. All three are produced just as cinema was coming into the mainstream. Because the medium of film was so new when these films were produced, it was obviously important and beneficial for them to meditate on their own medium—to think about what the medium signifies and their contributions to its signification. Literature, fine art, radio, etc. were all known entities in the early 20th Century. But film was something new and unfamiliar. It was something with which society would need to think about, recon with and determine the impacts of. There were questions to ask: How would this new medium—this new way of creating and communicating cultural identity—change life and society, as it existed? What was at stake? What was to be gained? What was to be achieved, threatened or lost?

Media are ultimately how a culture or society understands its own identity and communicates it. The ways through which we express ourselves influence our perception of ourselves. Media, as modes of expression, relay but also define. What does this mean, then, for expression and identity when a new medium comes along? Early 20th century adaptations of Dracula, in alluding to their own medium, time and time again, seem to be asking that exact question.

These questions are abstract, philosophical, broad, but ultimately, they are terrifying to think about. So the second proposal that I will suggest is that, with all of these questions in mind, the films—with their meta-cinematic aspirations—were aiming to do their most superficial and,
arguably, most important job as horror films: to terrify. It is frightening to think about the change and resulting uncertainty about identity that a new medium could bring—its impacts on ways of expression, on ways of communicating, on ways of being. New media necessitate a reimagining and reconstruction of what is previously thought to be known. The prospect of change, rather than the vampire, may be the most horrifying thing that these films depict; and the modern aura of Stoker’s novel, the convenient inspiration for this terrifying layer. Conveniently for Dracula adaptations, the horror that comes with the prospect of change is ever-present and immortal. There is always something new to be frightened of. Maybe that is what makes adaptations of Stoker’s Dracula and its titular vampire able to live on for centuries—indefinately undead.


Lotte Eisner, *Die dämonische Leinwand*, German translation from the original French (Frankfurt am Main: Kommunales Kino Frankfurt, 1975), 100–101, Print.


