A cinematographic vampire's tale: understanding the symbolism behind the horror i...

Cinema is the place where we as viewers engage in sharing a collective dream. Certainly, horror movies enrich us as viewers with the most dream-like of plots. This is because they open a portal into another world where we are allowed to engage with our nightmares. All over time various horror movies show us how normality is endangered by a monster, but the creature who has haunted the screen like no one is undoubtedly the Vampire. According to Ivan Phillips the figure of the Vampire has drifted and shifted through the pages of newspapers, travel journals, novels, poems, comics, and plays for 300 years, it has haunted cinema and television for almost a hundred, its shadow is creeping into the social, narrative and ludic networks of the digital'. The image of the Vampire is constantly present in the virtual and literaturecultureof the twenty-first century. Although this being moved from its folkloristic origins in which he appeared in works of J. Sheridan Le Fanu, John Polidori and Bram Stoker, the vampire still remains an iconic figure in Western Culture.

This personage provides paradoxical fascination as it exists ' at the edges of what is deemed normal, acceptable and safe, the vampire embodies the foreign and the unfamiliar'. Although, the vampire is often seen as a bringer of death, there are numerous metaphorical meanings and readings of this being. Through Marxist discourse the vampire is portrayed as the monster of monopoly capitalism and the agent of foreign ownership. This idea of the ' bloodsucking capitalist' is perceived in a negative way the Marxist community.

In a xenophobic society this idea of the vampire embodies a general fear of the unfamiliar and may also constitute a racial difference. But the vampire not only represents the non-conformity it also alludes to an illicit desire. According to Jorg Waltje, this being is the embodiment of humanity's ' hopes and desires: beauty, strength, and immortality'. Although these elements do not express fear in the same way as the vampire's link with death but in the same manner they express an external behaviour which puts at risk society's stability.

The vampire hints to a sense of ' unsettlement'. Through his figure the viewer, in a quite troubled sense, comes face-to-face with the dramatization of humanity. As a creature, the vampire encompasses men's vulnerability and his inability to alter the laws of time. As Sarah Sceats states ' Vampires represent what we both fear and desire; they evoke a marginal world of darkness, secrecy, vulnerability, excess, and horror. Whatever they are, it is positively Other'. This notion of 'excess' was also tackled by Omar Calabrese in one of his chapters.

According to Calabrese one could only escape from ' a closed system' through this notion of excess. The vampire represents this excess as he personifies ' those aspects excluded or rejected by society, its existence in itself denotes excess'. In addition to this, Calabrese associates this vampiric excess to the exotic erotic which alludes to the scandal and breaks the boundaries of what is socially acceptable. In this sense the vampire's bite is linked with the erotic. Further to this ' explicit erotic act' we have an unavoidable act with death.

It was Bram Stoker which explored this notion in his novel Dracula. In the scene, where Lucy dies we see an excessive use of the erotic; ' She seemed like a nightmare of Lucy as she lay there; the pointed teeth, the bloodstained, voluptuous mouth – which it made one shudder to see – the whole carnal and unspiritual appearance, seeming like a devilish mockery of Lucy's sweet purity'. Through this, Bram Stolker illustrates us with an example of how death is linked to the erotic. The notion of 'excess' is repetitively used and reused by Stolker. In fact, he describes Lucy as a ' nightmare ... hich it made one shudder to see' As viewers, as film enthusiasts or as junkies of the silver screen, we have grown accustomed to think that nothing happens outside of the frame. Yet this idea seems to crumble to the ground when it comes to Dreyer's, Vampyr. The latter haunts us with ' a distinctly innerving sense of not knowing where anyone is, creating a feeling that anything culd be happening beyond the frame, in the 'blind space' in which the monsoter lurks'. Visually speaking, Vampyr resembles Jean Epstein's La Chute de la Maison de Usher and Bunuel's Un Chien Andalou.

Dreyer's horror movie encapsulates ' clear moments of crossover between the two movements'. Therefore Vampyr distinguished itself from other movies of the same genre because of the various artistic influences which left their imprint. Comparison can also be drawn between more contemporary movies which are not necessarily classified under an artistic movement but which are still relevant to vampire studies. Coppola's movie is

separated by decades from its predecessors and is more straight forward in the narration of events.

Visual metaphors are central to its filmic structure and the American director's interpretation is completely submerged in blood, but while this film is heavily conditioned by an erotic element, the scenes of blood in Vampyr are scarce. The ' spots of blood' carry psychoanalytic connotations. Barbara Creed states that the manifestation of horror is culturally and socially constructed through the ' images of blood, vomit, pus. shit etc'. These images emphasize a split between the law of the father and the maternal influence. This division has to be viewed under a pre-Oedipal line of thought.

In this stage there is a fierce attachment to the maternal figure. In Dreyer's vampire movie, blood is linked to the maternal entity because Chopin ' punctuates the flesh and transgresses the sanctity of the body'. Another overwhelming point stated by Creed is that the female vampire does not limit herself to mutating her victims into creatures which are one with the night. Her victims are testimony of the vampire's ability to destabilize ' traditional gender definitions'. Although lesbian connotations are often attributed to this particular flick, there is no real intimacy between Leon and Chopin.

The scene in which Chopin 'feeds' upon her young prey, does not communicate a sense of desire. The villagedoctorwho is at the service of Chopin, does not coincide with the medical man who represents a positive force in the traditional gothic horror narrative. In Coppola's Dracula, based

on Bram Stocker's novel, Van Helsing is an educated individual and an adversary to the malevolent vampire. The doctor 'sucks' the blood from the living thanks to the transfusion equipment just as Chopin uses fangs. The victim of the doctor's bloodsucking, artificial technique is Gray.

He is the character who often looks at the actions taking place by standing behind doors or windows; ' he is an outsider peering in'. In fact, Gray is removed from the narrative action even as he witnesses the first death. David Bordwell believed that Gray ' is a curious character' and he is more of a mediator than a provocateur of action. However, Gray still ' possesses an active and enunciating gaze'. This male character's progress is often hindered by other characters, by the props and also by buildings. What is so overwhelming about Vampyr is the collision between reality and the supernatural.

Everything seems to take place within a dream-like state and the movie is ' ephemeral, polysemic and shifting, provoking opinion and polarising debate'. The movie afflicts the viewer with dissonance and discomfort, especially when our gaze meet Chopin's stare as Gray is sealed in the coffin. The latter is an artefact which shares an endless tradition with the general notion of vampirism. It is the space where these beings retreat and hide away from the daylight. The coffin is the body-fitting box where Dracula and Count Orlock patiently wait their time to rise while the vessel is sailing.

This tomb or repository is ' the most vampiric of all enclosure'. Gray finds himself trapped in a coffin and at this point in the movie's chronology, ' the

spectatorial gaze is doubly trapped, within the confines of a sealed coffin and the immovable dead body'. As the coffin containing Gray's corpse is being carried away, the procession passes next to Gray's unconscious body. In Vampyr, the element of the doppelganger has a heavy resonation. Vampyr is venerated amongst lovers of the genre even though movie makers throughout those years did not have the present technological resources.

Old, B&W, silent movies may seem alien in form and content to younger generations, yet what some of these past flicks embody inextinguishable artistic and human values. We've already drawn remarks on Coppola's remake of Bram Stocker's narrative work into film. Long before the release of this movie, ' the most haunting of any attempt to dramatize Bram Stocker's novel' was Murnau's Nosferatu. There is a strong resemblance between Murnau's vampire and the one lurking in the book. What is it that viewers find so terrifying about Nosferatu?

Is it the vampire's appearance and inhuman gestures? Does he embody the general notion that " we fear whatever we cannot explain or understand through rational thinking"? As consumers, for there is no better way to call genuine movie enthusiasts, we ought to dig deeper and deeper into the sequence of images. Most of the time denotations come with connotations and it is up to us to fish out such hidden meanings. The imagery in Murnau's movie suggests the concept of repression and ' the arch is a visual leit motif in the film'.

Arches and similar structures try to stop the vampire from emerging. Count Orlock is therefore a repressed force who is also linked to Jonathan via these same arches. In a memorable scene in the movie, the Count emerges from under an arch and Jonathan from another as they meet for the first time. Jonathan is also linked to the menacing creature through the house which stands on the opposite side to his. Count Orlock purchases this house, thus becoming the young man's reflection. Jonathan is a loving companion to Nina while Nosferatu becomes a ' demonic alternative husband'.

Nosferatu contains numerous references to ' a number of traditional or cultural elements'. Myths about Persephone and Orpheus also produce an echoing effect through this vampire movie. Nosferatu was not meant to float in its own air bubble, separated from all other influences and ideas. Murnau transfuses into the motion picture ' the product of a synthesis'. This adaptation of Dracula, which donated to all lovers of the horrific this ' thin, repulsively bald' being, dates back to ' the heyday of expressionist fantasy'.

What come into collision are the natural and the fantastic. These two distant realms are central to Nosferatu yet neither dominates the film. The viewer cannot but notice the obsession with filing space and the ' obrusive sets'. Like Tabu, Nosferatu is primarily set in natural surroundings and both of Murnau's movies deal with a menace. The latter diffuses into an ordinary world and out of a fantastic, paranormal world. Nosferatu portrays an animal-like being (a mixture between a rat and a human skeleton) who is ' constantly associated with nature throughout the film'.

Even Count Orlok's movements does not coincide with those of ahuman being, in fact even his castle ' is like a natural continuation of the rock' thus the true protagonist in Nosferatu is Nature which is closely linked with its natural settings. In Nosferatu, Murnau used a sort of trick photography also with expressionist angle shots. As Gilberto Perez Guillermo suggests these specific techniques are used to illustrate a remote, fragmented and bizarreenvironment. Nosferatu is generally seen from distance and this gives us the impression that the nocturnal creature is merging itself with the surrounding nature.

Murnau succeeded into creating an iconic- power image through which he shows Nosferatu as ' seemingly immensely tall'. In particular the scene where the vampire is standing on the deck of the vessel which is no longer conducted by a human being. Murnau makes also the use of the negative image, this technique is ideal to express ' mystery, fantasy, and unreality'. This negative image basically involves an X-ray photograph, in this film it was used when Jonathan was being carried into ' the land of phantoms' in Count Orlock's weird carriage.

The three movies which have been discussed so far are all based on similar, if not identical, themes. In each case the relationship between the female character and the parasite represented by the vampire is at the heart of the movie's plot. Guillermo del Toro took on a different approach and directed a vampire movie which derailed from the norm set up by the previously discussed films. Narrative-wise, Cronos ignores the myth of the Count and

focuses on a device that causes transformations to take place within the main character's physique.

The Cronos looks like an insect which shares some sort of a mutual parasitic relationship with its victim. Apart from a different take on the blood-sucking creature's myth, Cronos proposes characters which are marked by an ' implied absence'. Del Toro's movie might ' represent a nostalgic look at the past' in the sense that the long-gone years receive a corporeal dimension belonging to the present. The main character in thisMexicanGothic is a perfect illustration of this notion. Jesus Gris is the ' purveyor of antiques and guardian of the new dawn' the latter being Aurora.

What distinguishes Jesus Gris with Dieter de la Guardia, the dying industrialist who is aware of the Cronos' true nature and powers are there past scars which must be dealt with in modern times. On the one hand the ' scars' of Jesus are related tofamilylife while on the other Dieter de la Guardia is at the mercy of an ailinghealth. Above all else, the Cronos is a ' fascinating hybrid ofscienceand nature' and the golden case is said to hold an insect which lives off human blood. In return the creature rejuvenates its bearer and prolongs his life, killing off the threat posed by ' corruptible, material flesh'.

The device is needed by de la Guardia because it surpasses thetechnologyof modern times. Only the Cronos can achieve what technology has failed in. There also lies a fine parallelism between de la Guardia and the angel's statue. The man's body is full of holes just like the archangel's interior which

is infested by cockroaches and if the statue reminds us of the divine, the deteriorating human body indicates an inevitable ending. Erotism is a stranger to the film's plot, yet del Toro's work delves into universaldreams, such as eternal youth and the conflict between life and death.

Jesus caries the device while de la Guardia holds the instructions; Jesus is the unsuspecting individual who comes across an artifact of mysterious powers and who ends owning itself to it. The Cronos dehumanizes him and his need for human blood becomes more prominent as the film unfolds. Just as the insect feeds upon the blood of the device's holder, the latter ends up developing an appetite for human blood. Viewers have grown accustomed to having a female figure within vampire stories. Whether the woman is a prey, a victim or an object of desire, she has been instrumental to Dracula's and Vampyr's storyline.

In Cronos, Aurora ' plays the role of the love interest for which the monster must make his sacrifice'. Transformation and shifting of form does not limit itself to Jesus'metamorphosis, but it also manifests itself in the relationship between the vampire and the female figure. The erotism is replaced by an ' innocent, filial love'. Contrasting and comparing characters and plots allows us to point out what is present in one movie and absent in another. Some characters from different filmic works may share the same attributes or characteristics, while others may interpret the same role but in a totally different manner.

The so-called " assistant", the faithful follower who is at the service of his master, is present in all four films discussed so far. However Angel, the nephew of de la Guardia, is not as submissive as Renfield and the village doctor. Angel's mode of thinking is simply capitalistic. He yearns for his uncle's wealth and represents the ' cynical angel'. In contemporary popular culture the power of the vampire's bite did not vanish but in some manner it did change. We can see this notion through the creation of diverse pop culture vampires such as Angel and Spike in the series Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1997-2003).

These modern vampires have been ' desexualized and de-victimized' because they only obtain and drink blood from butchers. Now the vampire is made more human and this highlights the fact that contemporary vampires have a more mundane appearance. In the new millennium the vampire seemed to have changed from a creature of fear to a creature of ' sympathy and emulation'. This is made more evident in online discourse about the vampire. As argued by Mary Williamson in her book Lure of the Vampire, in the virtual world the vampire is perceived as a ' forgivable outcast' and thus we sympathize with him.

In Facebook, a social network used by millions in the world the presence of this being is very strong. Through one particular application called Vampire application we see several imitations of the ' folkloric tradition of the vampire'. This application is diffused from one user to another via a ' virtual bite'. During this process a user is sent an invitation to enrol himself to such

application, were the user gets to interact with other individuals who share their interest and curiosities about this subject.

Users get to fight other vampires, fill their hunger or feed upon weaker vampires. Once cravings for this so called ' virtual-violence' are stated by many, users can also send gestures such as hugs to their nearest companions. Feeding and fighting are the highlight of this application were vampires get points andmoneyfor doing so which than they can be exchanged for weapons or to improve their senses or powers . In this application placing someone in a suit will result in losing all their fights for two consecutive days, which is quite a deal breaker.

This application also embraces violence amongst friends. Some of the many options this application boasts are the way one can attack another throughout the Facebook community. This application is filled with the erotic; this notion solidifies the ' traditional elements of the transgressive vampire'. At each and every single level the vampire's abilities achieves a new rank and this creates a new type of vampire. As noticed by Mary Williamson in the virtual world this being is not perceived as an ' outcast' but rather a fundamental figure through which players communicate. In the online world the vampires have become a part of a different ritual, a social ritual by which relationships and friendships are maintained and expanded'. In this application, what used to frighten about this creature is eliminated and instead it is accepted. In fact, with the loss of penetration of the bite the vampire is ' de-sexualized and sanitized'. According to Calabrese, the vampire represents only a slight alteration beyond what is socially accepted

and thus it represents; the shifting of limits. ' When confronted by an ' acceptable' excess, the limit is simply moved (perhaps to a considerable distance) in order to absorb it'.

When in the virtual world, elements like blood and the penetration of the bite are removed ' the virtual vampire becomes the monster that is us'. In the twentieth century, sympathy for this being has grown bigger. In fact as stated by Williamson, this being has generated new implications and attitudes ' towards the ' self ' in the twentieth century'. There is a great desire to imitate the vampire not as a rebellious figure but rather to imitate a ' bohemian outsiderdom which locates the individual as the desirable outsider, the sympathetically alienated'. In the virtual context perception of the self becomes ' fluid and flexible'.

As it is no longer linked with the body but it is highly linked with the fulfilment of desires. In this sense identity is constructed as one desires. The virtual identity can be understood through the Lancian psychoanalytic theory. ' In the online world the virtual identity is not reflected but is rather constructed; the subject is not created in the reflection but rather in the digital composite'. This leads us to do a parallelism between the vampire and the virtual identity. According to Shannon Winnubst, the site represents the mirror reflection in which an individual forms and constructs his ideas about the self.

On the other hand the vampire ' in lacking a mirror reflection, does not even register on the radar of identity-formation: he does not have the necessary

condition for the possibility of becoming a subject'. Also Rhonda Wilcox explored this theme using the imaginative Id and the Jungian shadow. According to Wilcox the online body represents the negative aspect of one'spersonality. In this manner the vampire is portrayed as the doppelganger of the victim before it was biten. Stoker's Lucy and Angel in Buffy are the perfect examples,

Stoker's Lucy from chaste to ripely erotic, or perhaps the souled and soulless incarnations of Angel in Buffy – so too does the virtual body provide opportunity for the vampiric shadow to find form in cyberspace. As stated by Wilcox, the imaginative Id illustrates the unconscious which is repressed and which encourages the pre-vampiric identity to free itself. In this sense online where the personality is fluid the wishes of the Id can be fulfilled as there are no repercussions which constitute some sort of restriction in the corporeal world. When talking about horror movies there is a subtle difference between the onster and the human being. But as indicated in films by Dreyer, Murnau, Coppola and Guillermo del Toro a strong link exists between the two beings. The myth and the vampire have always been subjects of debates. Although there are number of similarities and differences between Vampyr and Nosferatu yet both films show us the vampire as being more than just a blood sucking, nocturnal creature but it is also the representation of the darkest corners of the human psyche ' For this is one of the functions of our monsters: to help us constrict our own humanity, to provide guidelines against which we can define ourselves'.