Do film genres change over time

With reference to horror film and texts from the sub-genre vampires, particularly those dealing with the Dracula story, are interesting to investigating how the horror genre has changed over time, because of their lasting popularity but changing appeal.

From an industrial perspective genre emerged from studio system's dual need for standardisation and differentiation. These are based on recognisable conventions including narrative, character, iconography, mise en scene and reflecting ideologies of the era. Typically, the horror genre has retained many of its conventions while undergoing many changes else where, such as technology, changes in audience expectations, censorship and codes of conduct. The three Dracula films I have studied are from three very different era's and these are reflected greatly within them. All the Dracula films; Browning 1931, Hammer House Productions (Terrence Fisher) 1958 and Coppola 1992 are categorised by a narrative structure of Todorov's theory of equilibrium – disequilibrium – modified equilibrium model.

Browning's version is told chronologically and also is the hammer production, which is specifically told through Harker's diary. The narrative structure is vaguely similar between the first two productions and becomes more complex in Coppola's version. The 1992 version gives a background and the origin of Dracula. It can be argued that contemporary audiences are much more sophisticated viewers than those who saw the original films and an audience reading a text from an established genre is likely to be familiar with the codes and conventions of that genre from viewing the similar texts. Therefore the popularity of certain kinds of texts proves that for many audiences familiarity breeds contentment. Having said this, texts need to

strike the right balance of repeating certain codes and conventions while adding something new.

A contemporary setting, a final ' twist', a moment where a central character behaves unexpectedly or perhaps even a self-conscious parody of existing codes and conventions – in order to keep the genre fresh and prevent us from getting bored. It can be certainly said that Coppola's version does these aspects. The subtle moments of humour between Dracula and Harker upon their meeting, parading classic vampire conventions. Also the generic codes of Dracula do not match with pre-conceived audience images of the ' usual' Dracula. He is less traditional, old and has white hair.

He breaks the mould of Propp's idea of defined character roles. However Bela Lugosi and Christopher Lee, the actors who played Dracula before are more stereotypically as we would expect, black cloak, staring eyes, slick black hair and has an evil presence. Dracula has always been typically evil and the audiences are usually expected to fear him he is continuously the " bad guy". However the audience is positioned in Coppola's version to feel a certain amount of sympathy for the character of Dracula. At the start when the narrative begins in the past the audience see an anguished man grieving over the death of his beloved wife who committed suicide and has been denied entrance to heaven. He therefore turns against everything good and becomes whom we now know as the monster Dracula.

This relates to Levi-Strauss and Binary oppositions' e. . good and evil, light and dark. Levi-Strauss argued that societies use narratives to cope with the contradictions and irresolvable difficulties they face. This new plot also adds

a twist for the audience who would probably now know the story and would be more entertained with this new plot. If you look at the code of ethics applied to films in 1930's which banned explicit nudity, swearing, excessive and lustful kissing, and most scenes of violence and gore you can see how far what is considered acceptable, or tasteful, by both audiences and the film industry has moved on.

Modern audiences are used to much more graphic sex and violence and the boundaries of what is considered to be ' tasteful' in film are stretched more and more each year. Examples from the films would include the frequent cuts of the 1931 version. The strict BBFC rules would not tolerate the showing of blood or killing of the victims. Browning's use of shadows and short cuts was used not to shock the audience as much. It can be argued that the imagination of what is happening and not actually viewing it can be scarier. The cut away shots of the first film are in complete contrast to Coppola's version.

Within the first the ten minutes we see Dracula transformation into what we know as today, the use of the pouring blood and perhaps the blasphemy of the church would never be used in the 1930's. An obvious statement of genre changing over time would involve advances in technology. In 1931 Browning's version had no dietetic sound this created a sense of realism. Tension was mainly created through the camera work. The Hammer production sound use was very sinister and daunting especially during the open sequence.

The loud clashing of the symbols reflected the gothic surroundings of the castle. This has evolved not only technologically but also in audience expectations. The sound of the 1992 version is very dramatic alike the 1958 film, but with the sub-plot of the seduction of mina the music becomes a romantic accompaniment to the scene. The emotive intensity of violins and at the climatic moment, it appears that Dracula is controlled by his feelings for Mina rather than vice-versa.

Examples of technological advances in the film industry include the invention of the Steadicam, which allowed the camera to appear to float and enabled the stalking shots so important in horror films. Developments in digital video editing techniques, which led to fast, paced editing and exact pacing of music with on-screen action. The great advances of the modern era of the film is the continuity editing. The great shots in Coppola's film are the cross dissolves between the bite marks on the neck to eyes of a wolf and the zoom the peacocks feather and then a cross dissolve to the train tunnel. This renders the production process invisible and enables the spectator to read the film without confusion and puts the audience in an omniscient point of view. The iconography of classic Dracula films is representing in all the versions.

The signifiers such as the gothic Dracula castle, bats, wolves and crosses are used throughout. The signifiers become more graphic and scenic within the different films. The iconic dripping blood titles of the opening sequence in the Hammer production are almost expected during a Dracula film. The ideologies of the films especially in the first two versions reflect the ideologies of the Victorian era. The main character's, that are men, are

mainly middle class and well spoken. The ' hero's' are superior to the rest of society and have jobs such as academics, scientists and lawyers.

The lower classes are shown to be no than peasants and less intellectual for example the women selling flowers and the warden at the asylum who is represented as a stereotypical lower class Londoner. The women on the street who was killed by Dracula was certainly dispensable and was a victim that was not supposed to trouble the sympathies of the audience. The representation of the women in all three films is varied. In Browning's version there are very few women apart from Mina and Lucy who are no more than socialites. In Fisher's version the representations of the damsel in distress is played upon. The connotations of her dressed in pale pink are that of fragile person, Dracula's wives are subservient.

The other women are cooks and servants with the men ordering them around. The women are sitting down with the men standing over them and protecting them. There is a huge contrast within Coppola's version. When we meet Mina and Lucy they are glaring over Victorian pornography and discussing Lucy's sexual life.

Wherever you stand in this argument, it is clear that contemporary audiences are harder to shock and more accustomed to representations of graphic violence, sexual images and ' bad' language as well as more spectacular special effects than ever before. Even though this production is set in the Victorian times the different texts reflect the values and concerns of the society around when the film was made. Overall genres do change

over time. They develop in numerous ways including technology, representations in society and in some ways narrative.

The example of the Dracula films proves that the genre changes with respect to audience preferences.