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Sex, Terror, and *Bram Stoker's Dracula*: Coppola's Reinvention of Film History

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Abstract: This essay takes as its starting point Francis Ford Coppola's inclusion of a series of manufactured 'historical' film clips in *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. These clips, which include both erotic farce and footage of a train rushing toward the audience (often mistaken for the Lumière Brothers' seminal film, *Arrival of a Train at the Station*), construct a version of Victorian film history that locates it in a genealogy of terror, voyeurism, and female sexuality on display. Through an analysis of *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, this essay excavates the ways in which Coppola's neo-Victorian film history both reimagines technology's role in putting female sexuality on display and explores the implications of female spectatorship within the context of mass entertainment.

Keywords: adaptation, Bram Stoker, *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, female sexuality, film history, the gaze, Francis Ford Coppola, *Dracula*, the Lumière Brothers

Shortly after arriving in London, the Dracula of Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 film, *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, accompanies Mina Murray to the Cinématographe to see the "wonder of the civilized world" (Coppola 1992: 46:28-46:31). Together they watch a few short films before Dracula pulls her toward him and manoeuvres her to a secluded alcove where he will attempt, but ultimately resist the desire, to drink her blood. Throughout this moment of threat and temptation, a screen in the background plays a series of black and white clips, including two erotic films and one of a train rushing at an oblique angle toward the audience. Most critics have accepted this footage as authentically historic and have pointed to the ways in which the inclusion of these clips, along with stylised special effects, locates *Bram Stoker's Dracula* within cinematic history (Gelder 1994: 88-89; Whalen 1995: 100; Corbin and Campbell 1999: 44; Sadoff 2010: 125; and Thomas 2000: 95).¹ While it is true that Coppola situates his work within the history of film, the clips were, however, manufactured especially for this adaptation, creating a historicised and adapted version of early film and its spectators.

Through this historicised view of early cinema and its audience, Coppola creates a genealogy of Victorian film history that situates it

alongside the emergence of the modern vampire myth. By associating film technology with a predatory force, Coppola underscores film's complicity in creating entertainment through images of violence (or the threat of violence) and the display and consumption of female sexuality. The train clip, in particular, references one of the classics of early film, the Lumière Brothers' *Arrival of a Train at the Station* (1895), which, like *Dracula*, has its own mythology, with film-goers said to have been so terrified by the sight of a train rushing toward them that they fled the theatre (as is depicted in Martin Scorsese's 2011 film, *Hugo*). While Martin Loiperdinger has convincingly argued that the myth about *Arrival of a Train at the Station* is just that, a myth (Loiperdinger 2004: 91), Coppola's reference to this film alongside a pair of erotic films grounds *Dracula*'s lust for Mina, as well as her own unsettling desire, in a moment of film history deeply connected to terror and spectacle. By implication, Coppola associates the terror Mina feels in the presence of *Dracula* with that of the Lumière brothers' audience in the presence of a technologically created illusion. Likewise, he associates *Dracula*'s desire for Mina with the use of film to put female sexuality on public display. In this way, Coppola uses manufactured versions of both the Victorian period and of Stoker's novel to create a text of his own that juxtaposes the history of film – most especially the history of women in film – against what he codes as a predatory spectatorship. Coppola's neo-Victorian vision of early cinema and its imagined audience explores the dimensions of spectatorship in a medium that, in his vision, encouraged an exploitative gaze from the outset.

At the same time, however, Coppola does not present a static scenario of the male gaze and female spectacle. Mina is, by turns, cast in the role of audience and object; she is both the sceptical observer of the new technology and the object of *Dracula*'s desire. This layered emphasis on the gaze is echoed throughout the film, with Coppola repeatedly staging moments of the intradiegetic male and female gaze in order to draw attention to both film's and *Dracula*'s functions in creating spectacle. By staging neo-Victorian moments of looking, Coppola historicises the spectacle of female sexuality and engages feminist film theory's debate over the female gaze. Through this neo-Victorian intervention, Coppola both historicises and shifts the vexed problem of the female gaze by exploring female spectatorship within the context of Hollywood mass entertainment past and present.

1. Coppola's Neo-Victorian History of Film

Throughout *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, and most notably in the Cinématographe scene, Coppola straddles the line between the authentic and the imaginative to present a neo-Victorian version of the relationship between spectatorship and women in film. Scholars of the neo-Victorian have pointed to the genre's playfulness with historical accuracy, a playfulness that extends and complicates the debate over fidelity that plagued early adaptation studies by recognising the ways in which neo-Victorian texts are true to their own historical moment. This playfulness acknowledges the impossibility both of faithfully translating a written text into film and of bridging the gap between the Victorian moment and our own. As Simon Joyce reminds us, the Victorian is always refracted, and, in fact, "we never really encounter 'the Victorians' themselves but instead a mediated image like the one we get when we glance into our rearview mirrors while driving" (Joyce 2007: 4). Likewise, Ann Heilmann sees neo-Victorian films as engaged in a kind of suspended disbelief that acknowledges the impossibility of ever genuinely 'knowing' another historical period than our own. Drawing on Baudrillard's theory of simulacra, Heilmann points to the neo-Victorian's "process of raising the doubly artificial to the status of 'reality' in order to hide the artefactuality of the original" (Heilmann 2009/2010: 19). This "artefactuality" underscores neo-Victorianism's engagement with the individual's desire to understand or know history and the question of whether this is truly possible.

In creating the Cinématographe scene, Coppola includes just enough historical accuracy to give his version credibility while manufacturing key details in order to emphasise his reading of film's role in manufacturing spectatorship. Through this mixture of historical accuracy and invention, Coppola creates what Dianne Sadoff would term a "faux fidelity" (Sadoff 2010: 130), embedding his film in a semi-fictionalised historical context. It is entirely plausible that in 1897 Dracula could have been held spellbound by the wonders of this new "science", as he terms it in Coppola's film (Coppola 1992: 51: 35). In 1897, this technology was still a novelty, following Edison's public unveiling of moving picture technology in 1894² and the Lumière brothers' 1895 invention of the Cinématographe,³ a machine designed to project moving images onto a screen. The Lumière brothers began showing their *actualités* (films of everyday life), such as *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon* (Leaving the Lumière Factory in Lyon), to

paying audiences at the Salon Indien of the Grand Café in Paris in late 1895, and the attraction proved so popular that the Lumières soon brought the Cinématographe to venues in other cities, including London's Empire Theatre in 1896. By 1897, moving pictures, using machines developed by the Lumières and their many competitors (such as the Englishmen Birt Acres and Robert W. Paul), were being shown in music halls and fairgrounds throughout England.

Beyond its dating of Dracula's arrival in London alongside the arrival of film, Coppola's film is true to its historical and textual sources in other ways: by embedding his vision of the Dracula myth in the history of film, and calling attention to its medium, Coppola, in a sense, stays true to Stoker's own interest in technology. Jennifer Wicke has pointed to the ways in which Stoker's novel is obsessed with its own medium and to the appearance in the text of modern technologies such as typing, shorthand, and voice recording through which the encounters with the vampire are recorded, distributed, and ultimately contained by means of Mina's "Vampiric Typewriting" (Wicke 1992: 469-70). Coppola's film, and its narrative about the history of film, likewise reflects an absorption in its own medium, an absorption that in this case reveals anxieties about the potential power of modern technology. Coppola draws our attention both to film's artifice and to the historical development of cinematic techniques through stylised and anachronistic effects (such as iris shots and superimpositions) marking transitions and drawing thematic links between scenes. The accentuated shadows used throughout the film point to the history of vampire films, and F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) in particular, and to the history of film itself, which emerged out of a tradition of shadow play. Not only does an expressive shadow accompany Dracula throughout the film, but in the opening sequence, shadow puppets are used to depict an elaborate and bloody battle scene in which bodies are impaled and left hanging aloft on spears (just as the historical Vlad the Impaler is reputed to have done). In the background of the Cinématographe scene, the same shadow puppets appear once again, with the difference that the camera reveals the mechanical workings of those puppets, thus literally lifting the veil and revealing their artifice.

This mixture of the authentic and the artificial allows Coppola to re-read film history through the twin constructed and mediating lenses of terror and sexuality. His re-working of the Lumières' *Arrival of a Train at the*

Station, for example, sharpens the sense of perceived threat that the train is said to have suggested to early audiences. In the Lumières' version, the train moves almost immediately into the station at an oblique angle to the viewer, whereas the train in the footage in Coppola's film moves toward the camera at the same diagonal angle, but at a much greater speed and from further away. Watching the Lumières' film, with the almost immediate slowing down of the train as it reaches the station, it is difficult to understand how audiences could have possibly been terrorised, even if they momentarily forgot that the spectacle was an illusion. In Coppola's version, however, the film focuses on the movement toward the audience, positioning viewers within the frame just to the left of the screen and apparently in the train's path, thus suggesting that they might be crushed by the approaching train. In this way, Coppola offers a historicised glimpse of modernity and its myths through the 'new' technology of the Cinématographe.

Like the train film, the erotic clips that appear in this sequence were likely constructed especially for the film and amplify the eroticism beyond what was most probably shown in similar public venues during the period. By doing so, Coppola draws explicit attention to the act of displaying objectified female sexuality to paying audiences. The first clip is an erotic farce in which two scantily-clad women sit on a man's lap embracing him before they suddenly morph into a fully-dressed, plain-featured woman (perhaps the man's wife) with her arms around his neck. This return from fantasy disgusts the man, and he pushes the woman angrily off his lap. The second film presents an even more straightforward display of female nudity: a nude woman looks into the camera as she rises to her feet before turning around and walking slowly away. Both of the erotic films in this sequence are clearly intended to be viewed as authentic: they are shot in black and white and employ cinematic effects typical of the period, such as the stop motion photography popularised by Méliès, in which one character is abruptly substituted for another, and the iris in shot that concludes the first film.⁴ However, the probability that Coppola manufactured these clips is increased by the fact that the closing credits list no archival footage, but name the "peep show girls" (Coppola 1992: 2:03:18-2:03:24).

Coppola plays with history in this scene through the content of the films as well. Judging from lists of films screened at public Cinématographe showings, the content was much tamer than in Coppola's version (even if some Victorian viewers might have seen them as scandalous).⁵ While many

of the Lumières' competitors produced films far more risqué than Lumières' productions, modern audiences would be unlikely to find the films shown at these public venues as shocking as they might have appeared to early viewers. Late twentieth-century audiences might have had difficulty imagining what was so scandalous for example, in the bared ankles of the Spanish dancer Carmencita that caused Senator James A. Bradley to insist that the Edison film of her be withdrawn from exhibition at an Asbury Park, New Jersey, Kinetoscope parlour in July 1894.⁶ One way of reading Coppola's manufactured films, then, is as an emphasis-added version of early Victorian film: as in the case of the train film, Coppola has modified the content to reflect an updated version of what might have been seen as shocking to some viewers.

This is not, of course, to deny the existence of early pornographic film, but only to emphasise that it was unlikely to have been shown in venues such as the one that Coppola's *Dracula* and *Mina* visit. Coppola's manufactured footage is much closer to the kinds of films that, according to Paolo Cherchi Usai, would have been shown to male audiences in private locations, such as brothels and "smoking parlors" (Abel 2005: 525). Indeed, film's potential for use in pornography was quickly recognised, creating a subculture that reinforces what Steven Marcus, Judith Walkowitz, Lisa Sigel, and others have observed about Victorian interest in pornography. As Constance Balides notes, "risqué spectacles" and other forms of erotic film "are an important part of the thematic repertoire of early cinema" (Balides 1993: 20). In her examination of 'The Kiss' as the first example of film's fascination with sex, Linda Williams explains that, "[a]s in so many other examples of 'new media' [...] the excitement around new technologies of vision went hand-in-hand with the excitement around newly mediated revelations of sex" (Williams 2006: 291). In fact, it has become something of a truism that as soon as film technology was invented, it was used to create pornography.

The early history of erotic film is murkier than conventional wisdom would allow, however, largely because the record is so fragmentary. In fact, Coppola's revised footage points to a key challenge in uncovering the history of erotic film: while we are lucky enough to have rescued many early films, erotic films were rarely archived and preserved because they were considered disreputable. Eric Schaefer notes that, in general, preservation has long been a low priority for adult films, which "would have

been the first to go when storage was a concern” (Schaefer 2005: 100). This is even more evident in the case of early pornographic films, of which few have survived. In fact, a fragment of Eugene Pirou’s 1896 *Le Coucher de la Mariée* (Bedtime for the Bride), discovered in the French Film Archives in 1996, is one of the few early erotic films that survives (Smith 1996: 11). As Usai reasons, however, the scant traces that we have of early erotic films, some of which are known only through film catalogues as marketed to adults, most likely “represent only a small minority of a much larger corpus of amateur shorts” (Abel 2005: 525). In other words, considering the multitude of erotic images that have survived in other, more durable media, it is likely that many more erotic films than we actually have evidence of were produced and screened.

In light of how little we actually know about early pornographic film, Coppola’s re-creation of erotic film history depends on a re-vision of history that is at the root of the neo-Victorian. Coppola’s staging of the Cinématographe allows him not only to underscore film’s function in creating spectacles of terror and female sexuality, but it also allows him to imaginatively picture the consumption of these forms. As scholars have recognised in the case of Sarah Waters’s novels, neo-Victorian texts allow authors to intervene in traditional histories by writing marginalised people and events back into the main narrative, such as, for example, uncovering a queer London subculture in *Tipping the Velvet* (1998). This is a new form of writing history that, according to Mariaconcetta Costantini, is a way of “unearth[ing] the silenced histories of the marginalized [...] to fill in the many gaps by imagining missing details, events and emotions” (Constantini 2006: 20). The neo-Victorian thus allows for a revision of the historical record, an imaginative recreation of silences in the archive.

Furthermore, just as Waters uses the neo-Victorian mode to re-insert marginalised, queer voices into the historical record, Coppola’s recreation of Victorian film allows for a fuller exploration of both early erotic film and the consumption of such films. As Lisa Sigel has pointed out, while many pornographic images and books have survived, and we can recover to some extent evidence of the circulation of such texts, it is rare to find accounts of the consumption of pornography (Sigel 2002: 7-8). Much of our evidence about the watching of risqué films in this period comes from attempts to control public access to such ‘dangerous’ materials. Tony Fletcher’s research on the London County Council archives, for example, has

uncovered complaints about specific films deemed indecent, such as an 1897 film in which a woman undressed while being sketched by an artist (Fletcher 2001: 71). In cases such as these, complaints are the most readily available records of such films, but records of complaints without the evidence of the films themselves can be an unreliable source for understanding early erotic film. For example, one widely cited example of the first case of film censorship turns out to have been, in fact, directed at a pantomime, or stage play.⁷ The fact that pantomimes were often the sources for early films, and that the plot of the pantomime in question mirrors that of *Le Coucher de la Mariée* (itself based on a pantomime), only highlights the fragmentary and evanescent quality of available evidence about early erotic film. By creating his own 'historic' erotic films, and staging the screening of such films, Coppola is able to imaginatively re-create the consumption of female sexuality by Victorian audiences.

Coppola's film, like other neo-Victorian texts, reflects an awareness of the difficulties of knowing the past that resonates with the Victorian emphasis on using technology, and most especially technologies of vision, to make the past objectively knowable. Just as Coppola's fascination with cinematic technology echoes concerns in the novel, it is likewise linked to the Victorians' preoccupation with technologies of vision. As both Nancy Armstrong and Kate Flint have pointed out, technologies of vision, such as the development of photography, the X-Ray machine, and half-tone printing, which allowed for mass circulation of images, were seen as a way to "fix the image" in time (Armstrong 1999: 9), thus suspending history. Late nineteenth-century magazines, such as George Newnes's *Wide World*, brought images of the exotic to Victorian readers, claiming to back up the accuracy of the sensational tales within its pages with photographs. As the introduction to the first issue told its readers, "The *Wide World Magazine* may safely be trusted to carry into every home, by means of the infallible camera and the responsible traveller, the almost incredible wonders of the *Wide World*" (Anon. 1898: 3). Flint underscores this sense of the camera's infallibility, as opposed to the human eye, which is deemed to be easily influenced and subjective. As Flint argues, Victorians recognised that observation is inextricable from "the exercise of subjectivity, and of personal investment in the act of looking. Nothing showed up the limitations of the eye so much as technological developments" (Flint 2000: 30). Not only could photography and other technologies bring out what was

heretofore invisible, as in the case of microscopic particles, but they could also solve the problem of memory and imperfect recall. In this view, a photograph could preserve a moment much more reliably than an individual's memory could.

Likewise, one of the attractions of early film was its ability to record moments of everyday life. Early responses to *actualités* emphasised cinema's ability to recreate scenes in a lifelike manner; as one reviewer in the *Daily News* put it in 1896, "it is a contrivance by which a real scene of life and movement may be reproduced before an audience in a life size picture. [...] It was just as though one stood in the street for a full minute and watched the crowd go by" (Anon. 1896: 8). The reviewer was most struck by the camera's ability to capture a moment and create the sensation of having seen it firsthand. The history of technologies of vision, and their connection to an impulse toward accuracy, has obvious implications for a reading of neo-Victorianism as a genre engaged in the process of recreating history while acknowledging that we will never have a perfect grasp of the past. Coppola's film actively reflects a broader concern about the possibility of knowing the past; in this case, he has crafted a vision of Victorian culture that reflects an imagined version of early erotic film and its spectators.

2. The Threat of the Voyeur

By re-writing film history, Coppola is not only imaginatively recreating the history of erotic film, he is also exploring the implications of spectatorship and the gaze within the history of film as mass entertainment. It is noteworthy that Coppola has chosen to root his history of film in the invention of motion picture projection rather than the earlier invention of moving picture technology by Edison. Both events preceded Stoker's novel by only a few years, although the advent of the Cinématographe is marginally closer to the publication of *Dracula*. Staging a scene in a Cinématographe is, of course, more obviously cinematic than the sight of a group of people peering into the peepholes of the Kinetoscope machines that Edison initially produced for viewing film. However, what makes Coppola's choice even more significant is that the movement from peepshow technology to motion picture projection is the transition from the essentially private experience of viewing film through a peephole to the public experience of projection, a transition that, arguably, mirrors the ways

that Coppola shows film as moving the private act of sexuality into the public realm.

Likewise, through his manufactured footage, Coppola highlights an emphasis on public display that critics like Tom Gunning would argue is central to early films in which incidents, events, and bodies are placed on view for display's sake. According to Gunning, the "cinema of attractions" – his term for early films emphasising display rather than narrative – "depends on arousing and satisfying visual curiosity through a direct and acknowledged act of display, rather than following a narrative enigma" (Gunning 2004: 44). In other words, the appeal of the cinema of attractions had more to do with withholding and producing display than with the suspense of a conventional narrative. Viewers already familiar with Stoker's novel might experience Coppola's film in a similar way: the suspense comes from seeing how Coppola will stage or adapt moments from the novel rather than in the unfolding of the plot. In the cinema of attractions, early filmmakers transformed the private and ephemeral into mass entertainment by focusing on displaying the everyday.

As Coppola's construction of film history captures, however, cinema from the outset was not only about the creation of images designed for mass consumption, but the mass production of voyeuristic glimpses of the female form. Laura Mulvey, in her now classic formulation of the male gaze, asserts that women are put on display in film on two levels: "as erotic object[s] for characters within the screen story, and as erotic object[s] for the spectator within the auditorium" (Mulvey 1975: 11). This attention to the female form as erotic spectacle has, according to Judith Mayne, been in place since the outset of film technology (Mayne 1987: 64-65). Early films, such as Edison's *Trapeze Disrobing Act* (1901) and *What Happened on Twenty-Third Street* (1901) hinge on the revelation of the female body, with *Trapeze Disrobing Act* featuring two male spectators eagerly watching as the trapeze artist sheds her clothes in a quasi striptease. Similarly, Constance Balides points out that films about everyday life focused on revealing the female form during otherwise ordinary situations; for instance, *What Happened on Twenty-Third Street, New York City* culminates in a woman walking over a grate, with the wind blowing her skirt up to her knees (Balides 1993: 20).⁸ The thrill of the exposed female leg constitutes the main attraction of these films. Thus, Coppola's reading of the ways in which film history is inextricably rooted in the impulse to use technology to

exploit the erotic potential of the female body as object of display lines up with what other critics have observed about the early years of film.

Repeatedly, Coppola emphasises the act of looking at the female body by effectively stopping the action and focusing on the gaze, drawing on what Mulvey describes as the “show-girl device”: i.e., moments in which “[a] woman performs within the narrative, [and] the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude” (Mulvey 1975: 12). Although Coppola directs attention to the gaze throughout the film – such as when the suitors gaze on Lucy Westenra’s enfevered body and when Mina looks on in horror as Dracula in his werewolf form ravishes Lucy – the clearest example of Coppola’s use of the show-girl device is in the Cinématographe scene, in which all eyes are directed to the action on the intradiegetic screen. The staging of this scene, however, is most striking because it does not reinforce myths about Victorian relations to the gaze: Coppola neither shows audiences running from the screen at the sight of the train – as Scorsese does in *Hugo* – nor does he show them as outraged by the nudity on public display. Rather than reiterating ideas about Victorian naiveté or prudery, Coppola’s recreation of the Victorian origins of film can be said to be making a more complicated connection between the threatening voyeurism associated with Dracula and the technology which, from its beginning, created opportunities to incite terror and display the female body. In Coppola’s reading, even in the beginning of film, audiences passively accepted the use of threat and female sexuality for entertainment, just as the crowds in the fairground tent fail to notice Dracula’s predatory attack on Mina. Only when the wolf enters the tent does the expected moment of panic unfold.

The display of female sexuality, and its link both to film and to the vampire, within a film that relentlessly reminds us that we are watching a film, further suggests the dangerous possibilities of film in its relation to the voyeur. Likewise, the intersections of cinematic history, violence, and the spectacle of female sexuality in Coppola’s film points to the medium’s complicity in commodifying sexuality for voyeuristic consumption. Coppola’s reading of film history closely links the exposure of the female body to the threat of violence. According to film historian Laurent Mannoni, both sex and violence were present right from the beginning of film (Mannoni 2000: 404), and Linda Williams has pointed to Edison’s ‘The

Kiss' (1895) and 'The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots' (1895) as two early works establishing the cinematic primacy of sex and violence (Williams 2006: 336). The broader context of the Cinématographe scene that I have been discussing points to the ways in which film underscores this point: immediately following the scene in which Arthur Holmwood, Quincey Morris, and Dr. John Seward gaze on and puzzle over Lucy's diseased and sexually enfevered body as she writhes on a couch, the camera zooms in on the teeth marks on her neck as they dissolve into the eyes of the wolf who has escaped from the London Zoo and wandered into the Cinématographe. The camera's perspective then shifts to a shot of a film screen, implying that we are now seeing through the wolf's eyes as he watches a primarily male audience clearly enjoying the erotic films described above. Allegorically, an animalistic side of human instinct has wandered into the theatre and is loose among the public. Through the wolf's point of view, the viewer is literally put into the position of the predator, although the prey itself is ambiguous – is it the women on screen or the audience watching it? In this way, the wolf's predatory watching is also associated with the spectators within the scene. Thus, this wolfish act of looking, shared by Dracula, and, by extension, the spectators – both of the film and of Lucy's body – is coded as predatory and dangerous.

In order to emphasise the predatory aspect of watching, Coppola deliberately uses point of view throughout *Bram Stoker's Dracula* to suggest a threat, especially in sequences filmed from the wolf's point of view. As Coppola explains in a gloss on the published script, these choices reflect his belief that "[t]he predator's POV should always be scary" (Coppola and Hart 1992: 89). Referring to a later scene in which the camera tracks through the garden searching for Lucy from Dracula's, and, by extension, the audience's, point of view, Roman Coppola, who supervised the visual effects, describes the technique called 'pixilation', in which point of view moves erratically through individual images that are used like stop motion photography, "giving the effect of an animal-like sensory perception, something primordial" (Coppola and Hart 1992: 89). Through point of view, the audience is placed directly in the position of the beast, and Coppola thus draws a connection between the predator's threat and the voyeurism that films invite. The connection Coppola makes between fantasy, film history, voyeurism, and the nude female form thus becomes doubly charged within a film that relentlessly produces the spectacle of

female sexuality while drawing a connection between spectators and predators. Here the logic of Coppola's manufactured footage becomes most suggestive – *Bram Stoker's Dracula* is simultaneously complicit in producing the spectacle of female sexuality for predatory, voyeuristic consumption and self-consciously critical of that same process.

3. The Female Gaze

While *Bram Stoker's Dracula* seems to reinforce Mulvey's point about the voyeuristic male gaze directed toward a female spectacle, Coppola creates the image of *both* the male and female viewer in this film. In this way, while this is by no means a feminist film, Coppola explores the implications of the female gaze, a subject which has engaged feminist film criticism since Mulvey's landmark article (Mulvey 1981, Doane 1992, and Felber 2001). Just as often as Coppola's film focuses on the spectacle of the female body, it also draws attention to both Lucy and Mina as female spectators. Through Lucy and Mina, Coppola presents a historicised vision of the female gaze, and, by extension, examines the place of female spectators in the history of mass media.

However, Coppola's presentation of Lucy's aggressive, 'monstrous' spectatorship renders his vision of the female gaze, and female sexuality, deeply problematic. Lucy's eagerness as she delightedly scans *Arabian Nights* and gazes with coy sexuality on her three suitors foreshadows her eventual eruption into vampiric sexuality once bitten by Dracula, thus becoming what Barbara Creed would term the 'monstrous-feminine'. As Creed argues, the monstrous-feminine reverses the notion of passive female victim, and women's monstrosity emerges through an aggressive, threatening sexuality (Creed 1993: 3). In Creed's formulation, the monstrous-feminine represents a gendered role reversal that mirrors the post-Mulvey shift from the male gaze/passive female to the active female gaze/passive male victim. Lucy's emergence into an aggressively sexual vampire mirrors film's ability to put the female body on display. Although Lucy's sexuality before meeting Dracula is emphasised by her innuendo-filled flirtation with the suitors and her fantasies about sex, the vampiric transformation unleashes her sexuality, "but in a more vixen, leering, slut kind of way", as Coppola's directions about her makeup indicate (Coppola and Hart 1992: 119).

Because Coppola presents Lucy's sexuality as monstrous, and because he makes an association between film technology, female sexuality, and predatory threats, critics have read this film as condemning female sexuality, and, by extension, the female gaze. Christopher Sharrett, for example, asserts that "Coppola uses the image of Dracula merely as a device to suggest the wrong turns sexual curiosity may take" (Sharrett 1993: 108). Sharrett sees *Bram Stoker's Dracula* as a profoundly conservative film because of the way in which 'excessive' female sexuality must be punished and contained. That Coppola's Lucy must also pay for her liberated sexuality seems to reflect the 1990s historical moment in which the threat of AIDS expanded a public discourse over sex that both encouraged an open discussion of sexuality and a terror of it. Elaine Showalter sees the "moral panic" over AIDS as parallel to that over syphilis in the late nineteenth century. According to Showalter, "[b]oth diseases have provided the occasion for sexual and social purity campaigns and for a retreat from the liberalization of sexual attitudes" (Showalter 1990: 188). In an interview in *Sight and Sound*, the screenwriter, James Hart, articulates the danger that this film depicts Lucy's sexuality as posing within an AIDS culture:

I think Lucy pays for her unsafe vampire sex, her brazen attitude towards the world. She's spoiled, she's rich, and she can do anything she wants. Mina represents the other side of Victorian womanhood, all corseted up tight. She is suppressing her sexuality, where Lucy is flaunting hers. Lucy pays the price for her wanton ways. Just like any woman today who has sex with multiple partners and is not practicing safe sex is going to pay a price. (Hart qtd. in Sheehan 1993: 14)

Hart's emphasis on Lucy's "pay[ing] the price" suggests that she is justly punished for her monstrous sexuality. Likewise, Stoker's descriptions of Lucy's desire to accept multiple suitors, as well as the parallels between her staking and gang rape, have been read by critics such as Elaine Showalter and Elizabeth Signorotti as evidence that Stoker ultimately condemns and controls her both for her sexuality and her desire to be liberated from convention (see Signorotti 1996: 120-124; Showalter 1990: 181-182).

The connection that Coppola draws between technology, monstrosity, and female sexuality is more complicated than such a conservative reading of the film suggests, however. Although the film punishes Lucy's vampiric sexuality (and seems to cure Mina's through her redemptive killing of Dracula), it is not quite so simple as to say that renders this a reactionary film, because the cinematic logic is so wound up with the guilty pleasure of watching the spectacular sexuality on display. While the film's repeated displays of female eroticism both unleash sexuality and punish it, its violent containment itself proves part of that exposition. Like Mina, the film seems both disgusted by the spectacle of sexuality and unable to stop watching it.

Furthermore, a reading of the film as punishing female sexuality overlooks the significance of both Mina's gaze and Coppola's re-writing of the final scene. Through Mina, Coppola offers a meta-commentary on the film's attention to voyeurism: Mina finds herself simultaneously attracted to and repelled by a copy of Sir Richard Burton's translation of *Arabian Nights* and looks on in horror as Dracula ravishes Lucy. Likewise, unlike Dracula, Mina appears unimpressed by the Cinématographe; disgusted by his description of the films as science, she asks, "Do you think Madame Curie would invite such comparisons? Really!" (Coppola 1992: 51:37-51:47). Mina, in many ways, serves as a corrective to the intradiegetic audience that delights in the spectacle of film, not because she necessarily disapproves of the sexuality on display, but rather because it appears more like a parlour trick than a scientific wonder. Mina appears as a reluctant spectator, and her hesitant gaze and her horror at what she sees echoes her relation to sexuality within the film. Through Mina, Coppola depicts a female spectator who offers a commentary on the scopophilia run rampant throughout the film.

Likewise, Coppola's re-writing of the film's ending undermines a monolithic reading of the film as conservative. Whereas the Mina of Stoker's novel has been cured of her vampirism and returns to a settled domesticity in England with Jonathan, Coppola does not present nearly so neat an ending for his version of Mina. In the shooting script for the film, the ending echoes that of Stoker's text: after killing Dracula, Mina "rushes to [Jonathan] in an embrace. He holds her, understanding what has happened" (Hart 2002: 114). However, in the editing process, Coppola decided to change this ending, and the film's final sequence shows her shutting the door on the vampire hunters and returning to Dracula's side. By

shutting the door, Mina closes herself and Dracula off from the intradiegetic audience, refusing to be an object for the historicised spectators. At the same time, her actions remain on display for the viewers in the theatre, allowing an intimacy between the audience and Mina; in effect, the audience sees what Mina has chosen to make private. Within this publicly private space, a space that reflects film's role in making the private public, she kills Dracula in an act of redemption and release for both characters, but there is no guarantee that she returns to the conventional domesticity represented by Jonathan.

Just as many have read Lucy's unleashing by Dracula as no more than an expression of her own sexuality and desire to "marry three men, or as many as want her" (Stoker 1996: 59), Mina's romance with Coppola's Dracula can be read as an escape from the stolid conventionality of a marriage to Jonathan, played woodenly by Keanu Reeves. Deliberately, the film leaves Mina's future tantalisingly unresolved: she has been cured of vampirism, and, possibly, of Jonathan also. She has helped to 'free' Dracula by killing him, but it is not at all clear that she herself has been liberated in either a symbolic or literal way. By drawing a visual association between Mina and Elisabeta, Dracula's first wife whose suicide prompts him to reject the Church and become a vampire, the film suggests that Mina is frozen in time, forced to relive Dracula's obsessive love. The final image of Mina/Elisabeta and Dracula painted onto the church's ceiling represents what appears to be her remaining option: staying suspended in time, worshipped by and worshipping her dead love. This image, with its ironic relation to the Victorian desire to fix a moment in time, reveals the film's inability to, as Rachel Blau Duplessis would put it, "writ[e] beyond the ending" (DuPlessis 1985: 4). Coppola inserts Mina's gaze into a neo-Victorian imaginary, but does not quite seem to know what to do with it.

In this way, Coppola's Victorian history of film technology becomes more complicated: the Victorians are neither so buttoned up as conventional ideas about them suppose, nor is it so easy to maintain a conventional reading of female sexuality being punished and contained. In Coppola's use of the Victorian as a lens for the present, the romantic storyline of lost love lessens Dracula's monstrosity; Mina is clearly drawn to the romance that he offers, as opposed to the practical and well-behaved marriage that Jonathan represents. Technologies of sexual display, whether of film or the vampire, are shown as both predatory threat and a welcome, if ultimately untenable,

alternative to conservative sexuality. In Coppola's retelling, *Dracula* offers a marriage rooted in love and sexual passion rather than convention – in other words, the fantasy of sexual adventure made real. Ultimately, however, within the sexual discourse of the film, Mina's options remain spiritual death (Jonathan) or physical death (Dracula). In this way, the clear link between predatory monstrosity encouraged by technology becomes muddled, pointing out the double bind of sexual discourse within a culture that associates desire – especially unsanctioned desire – with disease.

Notes

1. Garrett Stewart, who refers to the footage as “an image recalling the most famous – because most shocking – of cinema's debut effects, Lumière's footage of a train rushing straight at the audience” (Stewart 1995: 191), clearly does not accept the footage as authentic; nor, however, does he explore the implications of this invented footage.
2. The Kinetoscope was actually invented by William Kennedy-Laurie Dickson, who worked for Edison (see Barnes 1998: xiii-xiv).
3. In his final interview, Lumière states that the first Lumière film, ‘Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory’, was completed in 1894 (qtd. in Sadoul 1948: 69). The first screening was in France in 1895 (Sadoul 1948: 69).
4. According to David Cook, the iris shot was an innovation of D.W. Griffith's, which places it later than the 1890s (Cook 2004: 60). Nevertheless, by using this shot, Coppola is referencing a distinct effect from early film.
5. For a complete list of the ten films shown at the first screening of the Cinématographe, as well as a reproduction of the programme, see *La première séance publique payante* at the Lumière Museum website: <http://www.institut-lumiere.org/francais/films/1seance/accueil.html> (accessed 23 June 2011). This list refers to the first paid showing of Lumière films.
6. For a fuller account of this episode, see Mannoni 2000: 404-405.
7. The case, *People v. Doris*, involved the theatrical production, *Orange Blossoms*, a pantomime that depicts a newlywed couple's wedding night. Although very little actual nudity appears in the production, a New York judge ruled that it was “injurious to public morals” (*People v. Doris*, 1897: 119). Accounts of early film censorship often cite this case as an early example of the attempts to control movies. See, for example, David Newton, *Violence and the Media* (Newton 1996: 57). Others refer to the production as

a pantomime, but nevertheless cite it as an example of censoring film; see, for example, Randall 1968: 11; Jowett 1986: 47; and Hagan 1982: 231.

8. A substantial collection of Edison films can be viewed online through the Library of Congress website at *Inventing Entertainment: The Motion Pictures and Sound Recordings of the Edison Companies*, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/edhtml/edhome.html> (accessed 23 June, 2011).

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