
The Postmodern Pastiche of Horror in Gothic adaptations: Bram Stoker's Dracula.

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A study of the history of the gothic genre hence demands a genuine understanding of history and the gruesome incidents that evoke fear and terror in the minds of the people over centuries. The frescoes depicting images of danse macabre found in the medieval ages not only portray the devastating nature of plague, but it tells the people about the inevitability of death in general. The witch-hunts of the fifteenth century also found expression in the gothic genre. The passion with which Marquis de Sade and Francis Goya depicted the cruelty they saw during the French revolution elicited outraged revulsion that translated into words and images of universal horror.

Like literature, gothic film also tried to reflect the horrors of their times as they evolved in the twentieth century. Real, vicarious or symbolic enjoyment of the pain, the sadistic atrocities aimed at the dark instincts of human beings had been at the heart of movie gothic since its conception. "The history of the horror film is essentially a history of anxiety in the twentieth century." (Wells 3) The horror film and modernity are characterized by adaptability and fear. The fears of the individual find in the film medium an apt medium to voice their dimensions. Deeply disturbing themes were explored by the filmmakers which were in tune with the collective anxiousness of the society. Social changes in politics and human rights,

and advancements in science, technology and medicine inspired the stories of horror. As the world around us changes, so do our values for good and evil and, as Wells' observation suggests, "the horror film is there to mirror these changes in character, plot, and theme" (24).

Many films understood the importance of shifting the scene of conflict to the mind of the characters thereby unsettling the reader. These early films which played on the themes of split personalities like *Dr Jekyll and Hyde*, made in Germany repudiated faith in human progress and redemption. The violent catastrophes of the last decade of Hohenzollern rule, and its dire sequel after 1918, had intensified national anxieties in Germany. Davenport in his work, *Gothic* depicts the picture vividly, "To outsiders, the Germans seemed to be a people for whom fear was a natural state." (327). We can see that death, desolation and decay provided many of the key notes of German life in the hey-day of its horror films from 1913 to 1920s.

The themes of psychological pain covers the problems of different periods. *The Student of Prague* directed by Wegener in 1913 aroused strong feelings about the inner self and the film was remade in 1926, with more emphasis on psychological duality and again in 1935-36 by the Nazis. The film fascinated down the decades across the Continent. Otto Rank published the essay "Der Doppelgänger" in 1914, which opens with a lengthy analysis of the film. Drawing on Hoffmann, Poe, Maupassant, Heine and Dostoevski, Rank did a detailed examination of the connections of the 'double' with mirror-reflections, shadows and guardian spirits. He suggested that the double originated as an "energetic denial of the power of death" (28), and that probably the first 'double' of the body was the concept of the immortal soul doubling as preservation from extinction.

Many other films also dealt with the theme of the double. *The Hands of Orlac*, originally a German silent film of 1925 was remade in 1935 as *Mad Love* in the USA. Its plot reflected a German psychological theory that postulates that hands had a life of their own, and that they could perform horrific acts abhorred or forbidden by the brain as symptoms of emotional distress.

The end of World war II brought a new anxiety into the public consciousness, that of atomic technology. Commenting on the change in post World War II horror texts. Paul Wells finds that, "transformation is a key theme in these texts, and once more constitutes a re-configuration of the monster." Worsfold observes that:

“While the mutants of the creature feature clearly represent the fear and uncertainty associated with the nuclear age, the mutation of everyday insects and animals, such as ants and crabs, into giant super-beasts offers fascinating commentary on the idea of nature reasserting itself against man. This shift of evolutionary dominance represents an important change from earlier horror films, such as *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932) and *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1933), where man is seen as the dominant creature or as above the laws of nature. This move towards a more critical self-view marks an important shift in the structure of horror films, and perhaps it was this shift that opened the door for the deeper exploration of social and psychological issues of later horror productions (“An examination of change”)

In the post modern horror film where the paradigms of good and evil shift based on the perspectives of individuals, ambiguity becomes the stuff, horror films are made of and the failure

to categorise beings put the viewer into a state of paranoia. So we have the werewolves which violate the separation of human and animal, witches, who assume the form of a familiar animal and monsters from the Alien movies neither human, animal, nor insect, but a compendium of all three.

In addition to the reading of the influence of contemporary horrors in the gothic films, a study of film adaptations also warrants an analysis of the presence/absence of the text in the movies it has influenced. As we have seen, the process of adaptation is not slavish copying, and the resulting product is indeed the creative work of the adapter than the original author of the novel, since, film making is a completely new process, needing the application of a different set of sign system. But however distant the relationship maybe, we can see the adaptations sharing something with the original work, the theme, story, some of the characters, or the spirit with the original work. The changes made in the original story are sometimes because of the demands of the new medium, prompting the adapter to cut short scenes, or add details to certain cinematic scenes undeveloped in the story. A study on how the story is treated in various Dracula adaptations can throw light on the process itself.

The path Dracula took, from novel to pirated adaptation through theatre to popular film, is important, because these earlier adaptations define the boundaries of most Dracula adaptations that followed. In a very real sense, FW Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) and Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931) are dramatically opposite approaches to the problem of adapting Stoker's novel, each faithful to the text in its own way; they provide alternative readings to the source material. Murnau's

Nosferatu emphasizes the animalistic and horrific elements for emphasis in Stoker's text, transforming Dracula into a mindless plague-carrying monster, while Browning's Dracula stresses the aristocratic and romantic elements of the novel, with Dracula always in evening clothes.

The two films are different in either ways as well. Browning's Dracula is a traditional Hollywood studio production, emphasizing fancier development, romance and the final triumph of Western patriarchal authority over the menace of the foreign "other". In addition, the film establishes a realistic framework for Stoker's story, the vampire is to be taken as real. Murnau's Nosferatu is a classic example of post-World War I German expressionist film, emphasizing the ever-present horror beneath the surface of the ordinary and the irrational in the manner in which the tale is told; Nosferatu suggests the possibility of a dream or a nightmare.

Murnau and the script writer Galeen made substantial changes to Stoker's source material in order to avoid copyright infringement, although they kept the basic plot structure. As David Skal notes in *Hollywood Gothic*

“The central striking image of Nosferatu will forever and always be the cadaverous Max Schreck as the vampire, his appearance totally unlike the film vampires that were to follow. Schreck's characterization of Dracula as a kind of human vermin draws its energy in part from Stoker, but also from Universal fears and collective obsessions (Hollywood Gothic 52)” Like Nosferatu, Tod Browning's Dracula is Stoker's story much simplified, but simplified by an entirely different

reading of the source text. Browning's *Dracula*, unlike the stage play, uses both Jonathan Harker's journey and the confrontations in *Dracula's* castle, scenes impossible to stage.

In *Dracula's daughter* (1936) directed by Lambert Hillyer as well as *The Son of Dracula* (1943) by Robert Slodmak, little is maintained of the source novel. After the 50's Hammer created series of Mummy, Frankenstein, and, of course, *Dracula* films. The *Dracula* series consists of eight films made between 1958 and 1974: *Dracula*(1958), *Brides of Dracula*_(1960). *Dracula, Prince of Darkness* (1965), *Dracula Has Risen from the Grave*_(1968). *Taste the Blood_of Dracula*_(1969)_ *Scars of Dracula*(1970), *Dracula A.D. 1972* (1972), and *Satanic Rites of Dracula* (1973).

Although few of these films are careful adaptations of Stoker's novel, they borrow characters, settings, themes, language, and conflicts from the Stoker source. They also create an extended history of Stoker's central character and in doing so embellish the myth of the vampire, creating a filmic folklore of the vampire that has become part of the consciousness of the culture. Hammer's *Dracula* is widely recognised as one of the finest 'adaptations of Stoker's novel.

Unlike Stoker's novel, in which various characters are foregrounded at different times - sometimes Mina, sometimes Harker, sometimes Lucy, sometimes Van Helsing, and only occasionally *Dracula*- in Hammer's *Dracula* all the characters except Van Helsing and *Dracula* are thrust into the background. The result is an exciting personal confrontation between good and evil, a confrontation that has always been the primary subject matter of good drama. For the next several years Hammer continued to release *Dracula* sequels starring Christopher Lee. These films take

Stoker's vampire farther and farther away from the setting and source of the original novel, but continue to serve as popular vehicles for the examination of cultural concerns and the dramatization of popular fears.

Polanski's film *The Fearless Vampire Killers* (1967) adapts its basic situation from Stoker a noble Transylvanian vampire terrorises the peasant countryside and is confronted by a learned vampire hunter and disciple but borrows its tone from the Marx Brothers rather than the writers of gothic fiction.

Perhaps the most unusual post-Hammer adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is Hans Geissendorfer's 1970 German film, *Jonathan*. It is the most overtly political of the *Dracula* adaptations. Geissendorfer's film is a political allegory that combines material from Stoker's novel with an indictment of Germany under Adolf Hitler. It remains, however, a powerful example of how effective Stoker's material can be when employed in a serious manner.

An entirely different kind of adaptation was Dan Curtis's 1973 *Dracula*. First, Curtis and Matheson deliberately avoid the conventions established by the Universal and Hammer *Draculas* as well as those of the Deane/Balderston play, returning to Stoker's material, and as a result they create the first "Bram Stoker's" *Dracula*, or a film based primarily on Stoker's text without the mediation of the Deane/Balderston screenplay, two decades before Francis Ford Coppola undertook a similar project.

When Mel Brooks attempted to adapt Dracula for his film, *Dracula: Dead and Loving it* (1995), a spoof he uses the Deane/Balderston screenplay rather than Stoker's novel as the source for the film, adding costumes, dialogue, and scenes from the Coppola and Christopher Lee films as well. The sedate parody includes references to the major adaptations of Dracula.

Other interesting adaptations include, *Blacula* (1972) which portrays a black vampire as the source of terror and also the porn versions of the celebrated story like *Dracula Sucks* which uses the framework of the novel for their own interests. Bram Stoker's king vampire, Dracula, has been alive, or at least undead, for a century, lurking in the pages of countless reprints and adaptations and haunting movie and television screens throughout the world, equally at home in Romania, America, and Japan adopting the conventions of every country he visits.

Studying these adaptations of Dracula, we can reach the conclusion that, the novel's success lies in its plasticity to adapt into the problems of various eras and metaphors. And the currency the story acquired over the years has helped the classic to survive even in the period that demands gory spectacles and explicit scenes that modern gothic demands. Citing the case of Dracula we can also come to the conclusion that, in the process of adaptation, a kind of pruning, selection and amplification is done so that the elements of the gothic novel which are relevant to the period in which the adaptation is made are amplified during the process.

A study into the adaptation of gothic fiction will also reveal the influence of fine arts - architecture, painting, stage designing, landscape designing, diorama etc. and performance arts -

theater, cinema, music- in the evolution of the Gothic genre. The terrifying spectacles provided by these various fields created by talented men in their respective fields, inspired the contemporary people, became the collective memory of later generations to become archetypes of horror in gothic genre. The gruesome images thrown up by natural agencies like volcano eruptions and epidemics which devastated landscapes and killed human beings in large numbers became fodder to the artistic minds of the gothic. The horror, mankind witnessed during the French Revolution in the nineteenth century and the Nazi rule in twentieth century proved that human agency can match the might of Nature in producing horrifying visuals. The relationship of the gothic images with the dark recesses of human mind has already been explored in a majority of studies. But very few studies have been made to analyse the visual impact of the gothic.

Studies also reveal that in the Twentieth century, gothic plots and narratives gave way to compilations of grotesque images which do not have any structure, meaning or form. To get into the mind of the monster in order to find reasons for his monstrosity has become passé. To enjoy contemporary gothic - which has already travelled a long way from the gothic world imagined in the Eighteenth century - viewers have to enjoy the spectacle of blood splattering out of slashed limb of a putrefying corpse.

David Punter and Glennis Byron found the importance of the architecture, especially castles in creating horror: "In this castle, then as in many others, centuries of history are compressed into a single image, albeit one that never quite comes together. A common feature of many gothic castles is that they seem to distort perception, to cause some slippage between what is natural and what

isdream.(259-60)” As the gothic genre evolved in the nineteenth and twentieth century the castles, dark mansions and the exotic locations where dark mysteries dwelled lost their magic and gave way to modern homes and cities.

The twentieth century with its wild incidents and gruesome theatricals forced the gothic canon split into subcultures in the field of art and music. Goth music, goth fashion and shock art were the answers to the heavy demand for dissipating the pressure of the grotesque twentieth-century images of war and disillusionment. This study finds that the camp theatricality of the goth subculture is very much in tune with the danse macabre images of the 14 century frescoes as both try to make a pantomime out of the inevitable tragedy and thereby trying to cope up with the pressure.

The influence of gothic novels can be seen in various examples of the subculture. The Byronic figure was a key figure in music, while Dracula’s portrayal by the Bela Lugosi became a token image for the culture. Some of the early Goths used the soundtracks of gothic horror music for effects and demanded the audience to respond alike through their costumes.

Meanwhile in the world of art the most contentious examples of Gothic celebrate putrefaction. Dubbed as shock art, the subculture utilises disturbing images, sound or scent to create shocking sensations.

In the world of Photography, Joel Peter Witkin (b. 1939) uses corpses and body parts, acquired from mortuaries and morgues and created such horrid images like the severed head of a bald,

plump, old man arranged on a salad salver or of a shockingly wizened, frail old woman in bride's clothes and makeup. They terrified and attracted viewers at the same time. In a famous advertisement Witkin listed his interests in Physical prodigies and misfits as photographic subjects for the purpose of eliciting horror in viewers.

"Pinheads, dwarfs, giant hunchbacks, bearded women, erotic contortionists, women with one breast, people who live as comic heroes, Satyrs, twins joined at the foreheads, anyone with a parasitic twin, twins sharing the same arm or leg, living Cyclops, people with tails, horns, wings, fins, claws, reversed feet or hands, elephantine limbs, etc*"("A Witkinesque")

In the world of platform games like *Akumajo Dracula* developed by Konami, a Japanese company, the symbols and images of western horror movies began to terrify the Eastern people. The enemies and the gothic design are culled from classic American and Eastern European horror movies and folklore. Japanese characters were also incorporated to add a local twist to the weak plot which holds together a series of confrontations.

True to the spirit of postmodernism, Gothic has evolved from the grips of stories like *Dracula* into a play of grisly surfaces in the twentieth century which do not mean anything beyond their gruesomeness. The genre has become an incongruous assemblage of motifs and images from different ages and cultures. Thus we have in Chapman's mannequins, the imagination of the sixteenth century artist Salvator Rosa, in Goth Rock traces of *Dracula* and in Japanese video games classic American Gothic monsters.

This smorgasbord of visual quotations does not refer to any reality, but on the other hand its attempt to copy the copies is vigorous and perceptible. Thus in Goth music we see Bela Lugosi who acted as Dracula in 1931, becoming the icon of the sub-genre and in the game *Castlevania* Boris Karloff making the monster. So like Andy Warhole's *Diamond Dust Shoes*, these cocktails of horror, with its ingredient elements cut off from their 'reality' begin to express deathlessness and according to the Postmodern thinker Baudrillard they "bear no relation to reality whatever (170)", where the copies are more real than the real.

The flood of gothic icons, images and copies expressed through different media, in its quest to frighten and disgust the audience, does not rely anymore on deep meanings or subtexts but instead it has become a playground for the postmodern pastiche where parody and satire are found to be the only possible ways to terrify the people.

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