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Media and Society

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### Nosferatu (1922) & the Vampire Lovers (1970)

While watching F.W. Murnau's [Nosferatu](#) (1922) and Roy Ward Baker's *Vampire Lovers* (1970) I came to discover that these vampire stories are less about the patriarchal battles of good vs. evil, and more about the repressed sexual battles between a man and a woman within the historical context of its time. [Murnau's](#) silent masterpiece *Nosferatu* is like seeing the vampire movie before it became a trendy pop icon of commercials, jokes, books, and over 100 different films. *Nosferatu* is still to this day the quintessential vampire film, and its surreal and haunting aesthetics of [German Expressionism](#) give off the feeling as if its creators were truly in awe of the legendary material.

When reading the article "Dracula in the twilight: Murnau's *Nosferatu*" by Judith Mayne, she explores much of the changes that were made when Murnau adapted *Nosferatu* from Bram Stoker's 1897 *Dracula* novel. When listing several of the changes the one change that Mayne seems to directly focus on were Dracula's central conflict and his relationship to the victims. "First Van Helsing is in no way the protagonist of the film. Instead of a conflict between two patriarchal figures, we have an encounter between a man and a woman" (Mayne, 28). Dracula's

famous adversary Van Helsing is reduced from Murnau's film version and the focus is shifted more towards Jonathan's beautiful wife Nina. Mayne seems to suggest that Murnau wanted the story to focus less on patriarchal conflicts and explore more of the sexual tension that occurs between Nina, Jonathan and Nosferatu.

The way Murnau seems to suggest such conflicts are with his innovated style of editing throughout the film. In one specific scene Murnau cross-cuts between images of Jonathan being attacked by Nosferatu and with images of Nina at home in her bed aware of the danger to her husband. "Yet in this alternation...an eye line match between the vampire and Nina suggests not only Nosferatu's attraction for Nina, but her own arousal as well" (Mayne, 29). There is also another sequence in the film where Murnau's cross-cutting suggests that Nina has in fact two lovers that she is waiting for when gazing out to sea: Jonathan and Nosferatu.

Murnau's brilliantly cross-cuts to Nina shouting "He is coming! I must go to meet him!" after a shot occurs, surprisingly not of her husband Jonathan but of Nosferatu's ship as he is approaching Nina's town of Wisborg (Mayne, 30). Murnau seems to change the representation of women when making Stoker's *Dracula* adaptation to the movie screen, as he completely cuts out Dracula's female vampire slaves and reworks the female character into Nina who ultimately replaces Van Helsing as the real threat for Nosferatu. Like Mayne states in the reading: "As is the case of the function of Van Helsing, female vampirism can be read as a weak link in the novel. As Robin Wood points out: "It is the woman that the work is really about"" (Mayne, 30).

Roy Ward Baker's erotic Hammer movie *Vampire Lover's* (1970) is a cautionary tale on the awareness of sexual politics and the sudden emergence of the feminist movement. It also becomes a perfect representation of the male anxieties on the ongoing changes of a woman's role

in society at the time. In the readings of Douglas Brode's article "Heritage of Hammer: Carmilla Karnstein and the Sisterhood of Satan" Brode suggests that male bias exists all throughout the production of the film, especially since the writer, producer and director are all of the male gender. I can admire certain aspects of this movie, especially for it courageously presenting strong female characters who no longer need to repress or feel shame on their emerging beauty and sexuality. And yet when looking closer the movie actually seems to be more hostile and sexist towards such political ideologies, presenting a feeling of contempt and rebellion against such ideas.

All the strong and liberated women in the story who do not feel the need to be lorded over by a man are clearly represented as wicked, manipulative and sexually promiscuous. Instead of encouraging or being supportive of such female attributes, the story instead presents them as loyal workers of Satan, whose main objective is to not only take down authoritative males but the entire aristocratic, Christian, social value system as well. "The parallel warning in Hammer's horror films is to an assumed spectator: female beauty unfairly empowers women by allowing them an effective means of entrapping men" (Brode, 117).

I understand that the women in *Vampire Lovers* all take a central, lead role within the story and no longer play the roles of the damsel in distress or the weak and frail victim. But again when looking closer at the movie you come to discover that the women aren't as in control as you might think, since it gradually gets revealed that the women essentially all take their orders from a more powerful and dominant male who carefully watches them on horseback. "While seeming to serve the women, he actually rules the roost. By consciously adding such a figure to the dramatic mix, *Vampire Lovers* implies even a sisterhood of Satan will in the Hammer version ultimately be lorded over by a male patriarch" (Brode, 118).

So what does Murnau's *Nosferatu* and Baker's *Vampire Lover's* suggest about the repressed sexual battles between male and female? In *Nosferatu* Murnau distinctively erases any trace of threatening female vampires from the story and only presents the sexually repressed Nina, a character who perfectly fulfills the 1920's female role of the meek, content and gentle victim who is constantly waiting for the return of her loving husband. Nina's sole purpose is to create sexual tension between the two authoritative men in her life (Nosferatu and Jonathan) and to simply be possessed and controlled by the both of them. Baker's *Vampire Lover's* is a frightened reaction to the loss of control and possession of women, as women of the 60's now seem to be breaking free from authoritative men and assuming control of their own situations. To deal with such social changes these women must be presented for men as seductive, dangerous and beautiful, women who clearly are the cause for the current deterioration and downfall of society's moral and values in a conservative system.