

The Language of Colours.

A Semiotic Analysis of Colours and Symbolic Imagery in Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992)

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Abstract

Reviews referring to Francis Ford Coppola's Columbia Pictures *Bram Stoker's Dracula* classic of 1992 recurrently mention the images owing to the camera work of Michael Ballhaus as the striking feature of the movie and highly praise them for their thematically coherent effect.. The colours, if mentioned at all, leave reviewers undecided to sceptical when it comes to evaluating their contribution to the overall composition of the film, though. By providing a semiotic analysis of colours and symbolic imagery the below article will show how colours and imagery in their inter-relatedness create coherence and cohesion with Coppola's interpretation of *Stoker's Dracula* as a religiously inspired morality play set in the context of Victorian cultural values and self-perception.



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The Language of Colours. A Semiotic Analysis of Colours and Symbolic Imagery in Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*¹ (1992)

I. Introduction – Francis Ford Coppola's adaptation of *Bram Stoker's Dracula*

According to Donald A. Reed, president of the Count Dracula Society, more than 200 feature films adapting the Dracula theme have been released till 1998²; each of them setting a different tone in interpreting the theme. Francis Ford Coppola's film *Bram Stoker's Dracula* of 1992 has been claimed to stick most closely to Bram Stoker's novel by both director F. F. Coppola and screenwriter-co-producer James V. Hart;³ Hart understanding Stoker's text as an "extraordinary erotic, oral, wet and feverish novel that people avoided like the plague".⁴ In line with this reading of the novel the film stresses both the theme of a religiously supported anti-sexual Victorian morality and that of sexual desires, sensuality, and eroticism, using the Orient-Occident theme⁵ as a cultural sub-text and widely neglecting the implicit imperialist potential of Stoker's novel⁶.

The controlled and the uncontrolled are defined as the opposing poles of human existence; the controlled being represented by the power of the mind, and the uncontrolled being represented by sexuality. Exemplifying this concept Coppola's film adapts Stoker's novel as a morality play showing man, represented by Dracula, as being caught in a desperate discord with god and being lead into sin, sacrilege and blasphemy as a consequence of this, and, finally, as being granted redemption and salvation through unconditional and, therefore, pure, but still, earthly love. The pre-titles sequence of Coppola's film clearly defines this religiously inspired concept. In contrast to the beginning of Stoker's novel the film creates a historical context of early modern Muslim-Christian Balkans warfare to start off Dracula's story by leading the audience back to the year 1462 and by introducing Dracula as a pious, devoted and successful Romanian knight and warrior. On behalf of Christianity, he is fighting the Ottoman attempts at conquering European mainland territories and by this is saving these territories from Muslim dominance. When his bride Elisabeta due to a Turkish intrigue commits a suicide shortly before he returns from battle and because of this is refused a Christian burial by the Orthodox Church he breaks with the laws of his religion. In order to join his bride he drinks God's blood from the Holy Cross he has stabbed with his sword in an act of inverting and blaspheming the biblical verse "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life"⁷. In an ironic inversion of the verse he is damned by being forced into the eternal life of an "un-dead" as the due punishment for the sacrilege and blasphemy he has committed.

This is the point where Coppola continues with Stoker's story, which is set in Victorian London of the year 1897. By placing the plot of Stoker's novel in the above context and by cutting the epilogue of the original, which sees Jonathan and Mina Harker travelling to Romania on holiday, Coppola re-interprets Stoker's novel as the tale of the dramatic finale to Dracula's 400 years wandering as a "lost soul". This finale shows Dracula, the damned and sinful "un-dead", to spiritually masterminding the fate of the living. Dracula is presented as a highly controlled mind and personality, who forces the uncontrolled upon the members of Victorian society: He masterminds the Victorian female characters' lives by sexualizing their desires, and he masterminds the male characters' lives by exposing and opening their minds, bodies and desires to the luring attractions of the females' aroused sexuality. Dracula is shown to follow a strategy of undermining and endangering Victorian self-perception as a highly self-controlled society. This strategy is extended to mind-oriented societies in general, like the protestant one of the Dutch vampire hunter Dr. Van Helsing: By sending his pursuers on their uncompromising exorcist mission to eliminate him in order to cleanse the world from "the Evil" he also masterminds their lives. Within the spiritual concept of Good and Evil Dracula is presented as the human claiming god-likeness like Satan,

and, like him, as executing spiritual powers which according to Christian belief are exclusively at God's disposal. Unlike Satan, the fallen angel, however, the fallen human's soul can be saved by God's grace. In Dracula's case God's grace is granted in the form of death, and it is executed in an act of devoting love by Dracula's re-incarnate bride. This act of love, finally, also frees her of the stigma of committed sin.

As far as the part of the movie is concerned which adapts Stokers novel the above levels of potential meaning are conveyed by the following narrative: A young ambitious solicitor (Jonathan Harker; starring Keanu Reeves) is sent on business to Transylvania by his boss because a Romanian Count, named Dracula (starring Gary Oldman), is interested in buying several estates in London. Due to this trip Harker postpones his marriage with Willhelmina (Mina) Murray (starring Winona Ryder), who is not exactly happy about this and decides to stay with her aristocratic friend Lucy Westenra (starring Sadie Frost) during her fiances absence. Back in Transylvania Count Dracula sees Mina's photo, takes her for his re-incarnate bride Elisabeta, whom he has lost centuries ago (as has been told in the pre-titles sequence), imprisons Harker and leaves for London. On his arrival there he first vampirizes Lucy, next contacts Mina in the disguise of a Romanian prince on a London street and successfully courts her into dating him in her fiance's absence. Meantime Harker manages to free himself and reaches a monastery where nuns take care of him, inform his fiance of his whereabouts and ask her to come and marry him. While Dracula is deeply struck by the message of Mina's and Harker's marriage and terminately vampirizes Lucy, Mina realizes that she has fallen in love with him and is desperately longing for him after her return from her wedding in Romania. Due to his vampire nature Dracula comes to see the now married Mina during her sleep and she allows him to vampirize her so she can follow him as his wife. When detected in Mina's bedroom by Harker, Lucy's widowed fiance (and former suiters) and the Dutch vampire hunter Dr. Van Helsing (starring Anthony Hopkins), who had been called to London to rescue Lucy, Dracula escapes for his Transylvanian home. The men and the vampirized Mina follow him, fight him, and finally Mina kills him on his request.

II. The Subject of the Article – Colours and Symbolic Imagery in Coppola's Film Bram Stoker's Dracula

This plot given, single reviews mention a lack of coherence with the narrative, both with Stoker's novel and with Coppola's cinematic adaptation of the novel⁸. The author of this article states that it is for the symbolic meaning of the story told to create coherence with the narrative. In fact, it is the high potential of symbolic meaning combined with the variety of scenes (in particular the frequent change in scenes and location resulting from the fact that part of the story is set in Transylvania, another in London, and the pre-titles sequence even playing in 15th century Romania), which demand for an individual coherence and cohesion building technique in creating the movie.

The author further states that the impression of lacking coherence is largely owed to the fact that the colours used in the film have not been realized as the major element of composition next to the imagery in conveying the symbolic meaning. While the definition and further conceptual and intellectual development of the central themes (the uncontrolled/ sexuality and the controlled/ the power of mind) relies on dialogue in Coppola's Dracula, their referentiality as well as the moral judgements and categorizations applied on them are conveyed by visualization relying on symbolic imagery and a code of symbolic colours and finally setting the symbolic meaning. The symbolic imagery is dominated by the four cosmic elements: water, fire, air and earth; by religious symbols like the cross and the half moon, and by religiously related symbols like the blood and the candle. It further includes the symbolic use of day (sun) and night (dark; clouds). This set of imagery is embedded in a code

of symbolic colours. The code of symbolic colours is based on the two colour sub-spectrums of Red and Blue. Green is introduced on a level of relative relevance, just like the two non-colours White and Black.

Focussing on the colour codes of Red and Blue, the author of this article shows in the following semiotic analyses of selected scenes and images of Coppola's film how this technique of visually linking coded colours to symbolic imagery helps to create cinematic cohesion and coherence.

III. The Uncontrolled – The Circle of Red

Coppola's film introduces Red as the colour of the uncontrolled. The varieties taken by the uncontrolled are the threat to Christian belief and Victorian values and life style, the evil and the (sacrilegious) sin, life and (violent) death, the sensual and the sexual, and Dracula's status within the Christian value system. While Red as a colour sub-spectrum refers to the uncontrolled in general, its different tones refer to the varieties of the uncontrolled listed. The major of these references, associations and connotations are defined in the five minutes and 22 seconds pre-titles sequence of Coppola's film along with the conceptual context of Coppola's adaptation of Stoker's novel.

The first reference of Red set is that of the threat to Christianity. The film develops this reference from a situation of doom and the atmosphere of a "dark age". The opening image of the movie shows the whitish grey dome of an orthodox cathedral with the orthodox stone cross on top materializing from black clouds moving across it. This sequence is followed by a close-up shot of the stone cross being illuminated whitish grey as well and slowly disappearing in black clouds. Next audiences watch the cross falling from far up to a brownish-reddish illuminated ground (illustration no. 1). Only when the cross is smashed there, a narrator's voice comes in to introduce audiences to the context of this sacrilegious occurrence. What you have just seen is the historical doom of Orthodox Christianity, and it is linked to Islam by the narrator's account: "The year 1462. Constantinople had fallen"⁹. Accordingly, you next see the dome of the opening sequence, though, not being topped by the orthodox cross anymore but by a black half moon contrasting against a bright flame-red sky (illustration no. 2).

This black half moon is slowly stretching over and across a brownish-reddish illuminated map of south-eastern Europe like a grabbing hand reaching out for these territories; the sequence being explained by the narrator telling that "Muslim Turks swept into Europe with a vast superior force striking at Romania, threatening all of Christendom" (Illustration no. 3). Only when the narrator continues to tell that "From Transylvania arose a Romanian knight of the Sacred Order of the Dragon, known as Dracula", the black half moon is confronted and its advance intercepted by the arm of a knight in armour with a sword in his hand (Illustration no. 4). The reddish illumination starts to take the flickering qualities of flames, and finally it turns into a bright red and yellow fire lightening up the black emblem of the Sacred Order of the Dragon (Illustration no. 5). From this image the figure of the knight Dracula in full armour develops against a darkened background of the inside of an orthodox church.

The colour of Dracula's armour indicates his intact status within the Christian values system: It's the red of the wine, the symbolic materialization of Jesus' blood (illustration no. 6). Exploiting the situation of the devoted and pious knight confronting the dark forces of Islam, which were identified with the anti-Christ at the time and were seen as the ultimate threat to Christianity, the film once again highlights violence and (violent) death as references of the colour Red: After kissing his bride Elisabeta passionately and desperately good-bye inside the chapel of his castle, Dracula steps out of the church and into battle, wearing his wine red armour. As soon as he does so the darkness turns into the bright red of burning flames developing into a flame-red sky against which the black figures of the battling armies, the impaled Turkish soldiers (illustration no. 7), and, finally, a victorious Dracula kissing a huge cross and praising god for the victory show (Illustration no. 8).

This reference setting sequence closes with the image of Elisabeta's face appearing against the flame-red sky and turning away from Dracula. This is seen as a bad omen by the knight who immediately hurries for home, riding into a bright flame-red sunset (illustration no. 9), while audiences watch the black figure of Elisabeta jump from the castle and towards reddish illuminated clouds in a scene suggesting a Romeo and Juliet context of intrigue and suicide (illustration no. 10). When Dracula reaches his castle he finds his bride dead in the darkened chapel where he had left her, draped at the foot of the cross, a red line of dried blood leading from the corner of her mouth to the ground (illustration no. 11).

Elisabeta's sight prepares the grounds for both the conceptual definition of Dracula's further status of an "un-dead" and the definition of the final reference of the colour Red to be introduced in the pre-titles sequence of the film. It's the reference of life being existentially attached to (sacrilegious) sin. When the orthodox priest speaks the words "She has taken her own life. Her soul cannot be saved. She is damned"¹⁰ Elisabeta's face is caught in a close-up shot, the line of dried, i. e. dead blood now showing as a bright cherry red line of liquid, i. e. living blood (illustration no. 12). This line of cherry red blood is slowly crossed and finally partly hidden by the dark shadow of the orthodox cross suggesting that this very cross is taking the life out of her (illustration no. 13). Hearing the priest's words Dracula screams in desperate pain, knocks over the font spilling the blessed, holy water, and shouts the decisive words "Is this my reward for defending God's church? I renounce God! I shall rise from my own death to avenge hers with all the powers of darkness"¹¹. Next he stabs the Holy Cross in the symbolic heart with his sword producing a stream of cherry red blood, part of which he collects in a golden chalice. Drinking from it he tells all present at the site that "The blood is the life and it shall be mine"¹² while audiences are again seeing Elisabeta's face with the line of blood leading down from the corner of her mouth (illustration no. 14).

Eventually the cherry red stream of blood is flowing down from the cross and flooding the chapel, making its way to Elisabeta's corpse while Dracula is abruptly backing off, tumbling, his hair being blown by storm-like wind reaching him from the cross (illustration no. 15). The sequence ends when the flood of cherry red blood, now slightly darkened, though, is just about to touch the dead woman's head and hair (illustration no. 16); Dracula watching this, raising his arms and desperately screaming again; still wearing the wine red armour of his victorious battle on behalf of a threatened Christianity and his status of a pious servant of his church (illustration no. 17).

By the close of the pre-titles sequence the following varieties of the uncontrolled have been attached to coded tones of red in this way: The threat of Christian society and values has been attached to the bright red of burning flames and the brownish red introduced in the sequences visualizing the Ottoman reach for south-eastern Europe. The bright red of burning flames has also been attached to violence and (violent) death. Dracula's intact religious status has been attached to the red of the wine. Life, which turns out to be a life born of (sacrilegious) sin, has been attached to a bright cherry red. These coded tones of red will be quoted throughout the film when being linked to certain scenes and elements of the imagery, indicating the moral judgements and categorizations made upon the scenes and images they are applied on. Besides they will be attached to further aspects of the uncontrolled.

The Red of a threatened Christian value system and that of violence and (violent) death is first quoted when Jonathan Harker is travelling to Transylvania by train, according to Stoker's original text linking this train ride to the transition from the Western, i. e. Victorian value system and society, to the Eastern one and foretelling the dangers to come: Harker, the representative of Victorian values, who has been introduced and established in the previous scenes as a young, neat, clean, and naïve looking, uncompromisingly ambitious businessman,

devoted to his job and loyal, if not to say, submissive towards his boss, as well as painstakingly conform to the norms of Victorian morality and public behaviour, will be challenged by the East like Christianity was threatened by Muslim Turks 400 years ago as soon as he will have left the security of Victorian London society. The symbolic imagery of the film visualizes this transition by the bright blue and black coloured eye of a peacock feather, through which audiences are invited to leave London and join Harker on his journey to the East appearing in flaming red illumination (Illustrations no. 18/a-18/d).

On the next instance when the respective tone of Red is quoted its coded meaning is extended to the dominant aspect of the uncontrolled: It is established as the colour code of sensuality, sexuality, sexual desires and sexual fantasies. By extending the code in this way the film creates a logical line between Orthodox Christianity being doomed by Muslim Turks in Constantinople, Muslim Turks threatening Christianity in general by reaching out for European mainland territories, the East being identified with the threat to western values by Victorian society, and sexuality being identified with both the East and the threat to a western value system. Resulting from this the Orient-Occident theme is defined as the subtext to Coppola's adaptation of Stoker's novel and the moral judgement and categorization of sensuality and sexuality is provided: Sensuality and sexuality represent the ultimate threat to Victorian society. They are stigmatized as "the Evil". "The Evil" does not show directly, however, or confront but rather sneaks into Victorian society secretly and undetectedly taking attractive covers to corrupt it from inside. The film visualizes this conceptual idea in the scene at Dracula's castle in which Harker is approached sexually by three female vampires. The scene, therefore, can be seen as the decisive theme setting scene of the film. After leaving his room during nighttime, Harker willingly follows a luring female voice calling his name and inviting him to a spooky room, the bed inside this room and to her body. The respective tone of red is used in a dimmed illumination mix of blue and dusky reddish dimmed light shed on the bed and Harker from aside at the opening of the scene, the red brightening at its climax and returning to its dimmed version at the end. After Harker has sat and lied back on the bed bodies start moving below the linen, next materializing from the linen and coming to life, slowly developing into lusciously shaped naked women turning out to be vampires. While the female vampires are stimulating the will-less and enjoying Harker for sex, the dimmed red illumination focusses on them. Again the symbolic imagery of the scene provides the (moral) categorization and judgement applied: When the naked woman melts the cross around Harker's neck by her breath, her vampire status becomes obvious. In further consequence, her behaviour is suggestingly indicated as being part of her vampire status as a damned "undead" sinner. In this way, the active female sexuality she is acting out and the joyful manner in which she is displaying her naked body in front of a male is stigmatized as sexually aggressive and greedy, seductive, indecent, and immoral female behaviour, inappropriate in terms of an intact female morality and, accordingly, disapproved of by the respectable parts of society. Besides, the sex performed on Harker by the vampire women is extra-marrital sex. A woman living such sexuality has placed herself outside society; the man she acts her sexuality upon has been seduced and raped. He, therefore, cannot be held morally responsible. This aspect is visualized by including Harker into the red dim only sometimes and by exploiting the imagery of female nudity vs. male clothing. Harker is shown fully dressed throughout the complete scene, although the female vampire is ripping his shirt, biting and licking his breast and nipple and sucking blood from it, opening his trousers and performing oral sex on him. His full dress suggestingly presents him as the inactive, though, enjoying subject to female sexual greed in this scene. In line with this, Harker is shown to be topped by the three women, their mouths being covered with his blood when finally Dracula enters and stops them (Illustrations 19/a-19/h).

The linkage of the respective tone of Red to the central theme of an active female non-conjugal sexuality threatening the moral codes of the Victorian social system and to the symbolic imagery of female nudity vs. male clothing will stay the dominant one for the rest of the film. The sinful quality of the sexuality suggested and performed will be further underlined in the course of the movie by the merge of the respective tone of red with the

bright cherry red of the (damned) life rooting in sacrilegious sin, which has been introduced in the pre-titles sequence of the film. The two thematical lines of coded Red are fused as soon as Mina's best friend Lucy has reached her vampire status after yielding to her aroused pre-marital sexual desires. In the significant scene she is shown lying on her bed wearing a transparent red night gown and eagerly presenting her bare breasts in orgasm, directed in her doings by Dracula, whose black shadow-arm is seen on the bedroom wall (illustrations no. 20/a-20/d). The tone of the bright cherry Red, which has been introduced as the code for a life owed to (sacrilegious) sin in the pre-titles sequence of the film, has already been extended to Lucy in the sex scene with Dracula. It is the visualized evidence of her willingness to commit the sinful act of pre-conjugal sex turning real in her nightly encounter with Dracula. In the previous scenes this willingness has been hinted at in her open confession to Mina that her nightly sexual fantasies are the very postures of heterosexual intercourse being depicted in Richard A. Burton's English translation of the *Arabian Nights*, which the two of them discuss after coming across them by accident¹³; in her sexually punning conversation with men, and in her sexually teasing behaviour towards her three suiters, whom she entertains at a time¹⁴. The fact that she is renouncing the approved value system in committing the sexual act with Dracula is expressed by the reference to the symbolic image of the cross: After she has left her cross on her bed she walks the park of her estate in a cherry red neck free and waist-down transparent bustier dress with a floating transparent veil, taking eroticizing postures and finally performing non-conjugal sexual intercourse with an animalized Dracula (illustrations 21/a-21/e) on an altar-like stone table in the park in front of an imitated antique temple decorated with two copies of antique female nude sculptures.

Before being extended to Lucy the bright cherry Red has been introduced as Dracula's original colour when being first quoted after the pre-titles sequence: It is the colour of the robe Count Dracula's is wearing when welcoming Harker at the entrance of his Transylvanian castle and leading him through the entrance hall. This for one defines Count Dracula's religious status as an "un-dead", i. e. a damned soul owing her in-between life to sacrilegious sin, for the other it defines his castle as the realms of sacrilegious sin. Thirdly it suggests that Harker, who is shown walking next to Dracula while the cherry red train of Dracula's robe is gliding along him is at risk of being embraced in these realms (illustrations no. 22/c-d). This colour signal is linked to the image of Dracula's black shadow in the preceding shot, moving along walls, stretched arms pointing ahead to suggest his way of un-earthly movement¹⁵ (illustration no. 22/b). At the same time this movement is quoting the movement of the black threatening half moon across south eastern Europe (illustration no. 22/a) of the pre-titles sequence and by this is setting the conceptual context for Dracula's reach for London visualized in his shadow falling on the map of London in the dinner scene with Harker (illustration no. 22/e-h) when talking about London and about Mina, in whom Dracula believes to recognize his re-incarnate bride Elisabeta. The following extension of the cherry Red to Lucy in der sex scene with Dracula suggests that she is about to become one of Dracula's "undead" kind in real after having been ready for this for long.

After the fusion of the two lines of Red the merged tone is quoted in all scenes hinting at the threat performed on social controll by socially disapproved active or suggested sexuality and sexual fantasies: the use of a supposed aphrodisiac (Absinthe)¹⁶ by Mina and inspired by Dracula in disguise when secretly dating in a separate room while Mina's absent fiance Harker is fearing for his life, Mina wearing a low neck cherry red dress on this occasion as the sign of her committed infidelity¹⁷, the overlapping of Mina's wedding and Lucy's death by a wolve devouring her in a blood gush, the three female vampires using their hypnotic powers on the vampire hunter Van Helsing and Mina to send them to (sexual) extacy at their nightly fire place in Transylvania¹⁸, and Mina being burnt by Van Helsing with a eucharistic host on her forehead leaving the red stigma of the sinner after she tried to seduce him and make him drink her blood, the showdown of Dracula's flight towards his castle¹⁹, and

finally the scene leading to his salvation taking place in the very chapel of his castle where he decided to become an un-dead.

The most significant scenes in terms of the thematical concept are the blend of the wedding and death scene (illustrations no. 23/a-23/j) and the salvation scene (illustrations no. 24/a-24/g), which is the finale of the film at the same time. Mina's wedding and Lucy's death scene highlight the threatening character of the (uncontrolled) sexual in Lucy's case and the purified character of a (controlled) sexuality being restricted to the socially approved institution of marriage. The opposed character of the two varieties is symbolized by the lack vs. the addition of direct light falling on the scene from above: The wedding couple in the church is illuminated by light falling from of church window and brightening the Red of the scene; bare breast, orgiastic Lucy is not. The salvation scene, finally, intensifies the focus on the socially controlled variety of heterosexual attraction. The loving devotion leading to Dracula's salvation is visualized by the addition of an even stronger beam of bright light to the coded Red of sin quoted in the previous scenes of relevance. In the final sequence at the chapel, the stigmatized Mina, the cross still showing the cut of Dracula's sword, and Dracula's marred face are all shed in Red and suddenly get illuminated by bright light from above. This light is symbolizing god's grace, and it first transforms Dracula's face, next it eliminates Mina's stigma after she has stabbed Dracula in the heart on his request, and finally it illuminates the chapel ceiling after Mina has chopped off Dracula's head to send him to peace out of love.

The addition of light indicates that the Red of threat and sin has been purified by being spiritualized: (Uncontrolled) sexual desire has been transformed into controlled, and, therefore, socially approved, devoting love. In terms of the underlying conceptual idea of Good and Evil the addition of light indicates that the dark of "the Evil" is being defeated by the light of "the Good". In line with this the circle of coded Red, which has been opened in the pre-titles sequence, is completed in the final shot catching the illuminated ceiling of the chapel showing the ancient couple of Dracula and Elisabeta.

IV. The Controlled – The Blue of Night, Ice and Sky

As the thematical concept of the film is a dualist one, however, the circle of coded Red needs a complementary colour code to fully provide for the cinematic coherence described so far. The complementary colour of the coded Red introduced in Coppola's *Dracula* is Blue. Blue is established as the colour code of the controlled. Like the uncontrolled the controlled is introduced as a variety; each variety being attached to coded tones of Blue. The controlled life of Victorian society, which only approves of a controlled, i. e. a de-sexualized emotionality, and promotes the mind as the leading aspect of human existence is attached to a deep solemn night-blue. The controlled and controlling spiritual power executed by Dracula is attached to an ice-like tone of Blue, appearing in a bright tone and in a faded and dim one. The controlled purity of mind and emotion is attached to a light tone of sky-like Blue. Like the coded tones of Red the tones of Blue are established in their coded qualities in thematically relevant scenes and in combination with symbolic imagery.

The first tone of Blue to be introduced is the Night Blue of Victorian social control. Applying a structural change on Stoker's novel Coppola's film does not open with Harker's account of his journey from London to Budapest but with a total of a nightly London providing continuity with the thematical context set in the pre-titles sequence by sub-titling the shot "London 1897. Four centuries later" and by including the sound of church bells striking the hour (illustration no. 25). This tone of Blue is quoted as the colour of the peacock feather eye through which audiences leave London for Transylvania²⁰, when Mina is throwing the letters she and the

disguised Dracula have exchanged into the sea on her way to her wedding²¹, and in the night set scenes when Lucy's suiters and fiancé discuss her state with Van Helsing in the park of Lucy's home²².

The coded quality of the light tone of sky-like Blue is set in Harker's farewell scene with his fiancé Mina at the park of Lucy's estate²³. Mina's dress is the symbolic image to which the respective tone is attached. It is a long sleeved high neck dress with a small stand-up collar. This cut of dress together with its light sky blue colour and Mina's comparatively low-profile make-up identify her as the conceptual antagonist of Dracula and the vampirized Lucy: Mina is the "pure soul"; they are the "lost souls". Accordingly, Mina wears this dress in all scenes following her farewell scene with Harker which put the focus on the conceptual opposition of the controlled and the uncontrolled: the scene in which she discusses the *Arabian Nights* illustrations with Lucy (illustration no. 26/a) teaching Lucy on the meaning of marriage; when she runs into Van Helsing on the stairs of Lucy's estate, being embarrassed by Van Helsing forcing her into a dance, holding her close, and calling her "one of the lights" within the darkness on earth (illustrations no. 26/b-26/c); and the two scenes in which she comes to see the already vampirized Lucy in her bedroom before leaving for Romania for her wedding (illustrations no. 26/d-26/e). The only change of the cut is applied on the light sky-blue dress in the park scene when Mina and Lucy are surprised by rain, and in the following first get under the influence of Dracula's spiritual power: the stand-up colour is replaced by a narrow v-shaped decolte ending at breast line.²⁴ Mina is established as the socially conform Victorian woman by dress, looks and behaviour, who sees sexuality as a "disgusting", "carnal"²⁵ activity being only legitimized by the necessities of married life and being of subordinate relevance even then. In contrast to her Lucy links sexuality to pleasure and joy. In line with this Lucy even in her pre-vampire state contrasts Mina in dress and looks: Lucy wears white shoulder free low neck dresses; she uses bright cherry red lipstick, and she is red-haired. Within the conceptual context of the movie this appearance indicates her as the virgin with the potential to be a whore. Nevertheless, Mina is not without sensual and sexual desires. The farewell scene is the relevant theme setting scene also in this respect: Although both, she and Harker, are socially conform, she is the more sensual one of them taking the initiative in urging her fiancé into at least publicly kissing her before setting out on his journey to Transylvania when he is about to leave without. The scene shows her putting her arms around his neck to kiss while he is still holding his hat in his hand looking anxiously towards the nearby house. The scene closes in a double symbolic exploitation of the peacock-feather image: For one the peacock feathers visualize the intimacy of the scene by hiding the kissing couple to the public eye, for the other the Night Blue of controlled London life is quoted in the peacock feather eye through which the audience leaves London following Harker on his journey to a red illuminated East (illustrations no. 26/f-26/j).

The changes in Mina's dress, dress colour and dress cut occurring in the film are either attached to Mina's social state or to her (temporarily) changed status within the Victorian system of social control: When making her first diary entry at her simple furnished room at her home she is wearing a simple highneck brown dress²⁶. In her dating scene with a disguised Dracula she is wearing a low neck cherry red dress stigmatizing her doing as (sinful and immoral) infidelity. In the scene when the disguised Dracula provokes a first encounter with her in the streets of London she is wearing a light green coat over her light blue dress²⁷. During her (controlled) vampire state when she is successfully seducing Van Helsing into kissing her bared breasts²⁸, commanding the four elements²⁹ and pointing a loaded gun at her husband to secure Dracula's escape to his castle³⁰ she is wearing a low neck black dress with a light green shawl and light green sleeves covered by a black coat. The green suggests her to be the re-incarnation of Dracula's dead bride Elisabeta; a dark Green having been introduced as her colour of dress in the pre-titles sequence³¹. The black places her on the side of the "dark" powers. On her visit to Carfax District Lunatic Asylum, now married but nevertheless her mind being occupied by her longing for the disguised Dracula, she is wearing grey³². In her sex scene with Dracula taking place in her own bedroom and in which she is vampirized on

her own will she is wearing a white transparent night gown showing nothing more than her silhouette and a bare shoulder³³, by this visualizing her even now intact purity and by this transforming the (uncontrolled) sex scene in one of (controlled) loving devotion.

The ice-like Blue in its bright version is first hinted at when Transylvania appears blue on an all red map³⁴ and (Dracula's) blue eyes show in a red sky³⁵, yet, it is fully defined as the colour code of Dracula's spiritual power at the end of the sequence showing Harker's coach ride to Dracula's Transylvanian castle; its faded and dimmed version having been first introduced in the scene at Carfax District Lunatic Asylum showing Harker's predecessor in negotiations with Dracula, Renfield, crouching in his cell talking to some "master" and eating a humming insect.³⁶ The beginning of the coachride sequence still quotes the London Night Blue with the nightly landscape³⁷. The closer Harker is coming to the meeting point with Dracula's coach the more the Blue is turning into the Ice-like tone, finally being fully developed in the colour of the cold fire burning in front of Dracula's castle (illustrations no. 27/a-27/c). The cold fire is the final item of the occult imagery which is used to define Dracula's spiritual power as a "dark" power of occult quality: Lightening is blinding the coachman of the first coach Harker has taken to reach the meeting point with Dracula's coach at the Borgo pass³⁸; one of the passengers on this coach gives Harker a cross for protection when they drop him there (it is the same cross the female vampire will melt at Dracula's castle)³⁹; a wolf skull is pinned to a wooden cross (illustration no. 27/a); howling wolves are circling Harker while he is waiting for Dracula's coach to pick him up (illustration no. 27/a) and are following the coach⁴⁰; the coachman of Dracula's coach is wearing a full-body armour and reaching out for Harker with a ever stretching arm and hand with long claw-like fingers (ilustration no. 27/b) lifting him into the coach (the image of the stretching arm with a clawlike hand being taken up in the welcome scene at Dracula's castle as part of Dracula's wandering shadow on the wall; the coachman by this being retrospectively identified as Dracula himself). After being defined this way the ice-like Blue in either of its versions is quoted in all scenes visualizing the effects of Dracula's spiritual powers; the most relevant of these being: the first sexualizing effect on Mina and Lucy being surprised by the storm and the rain going along with Dracula's approach of the English coast, both enjoying the feeling of getting soaking wet while running through the park in the rain and finally kissing, leading off their aroused sexual desires into homosexual experience, the directing Dracula's eyes and face showing in the clouded sky at the beginning and at the climax of the scene (illustrations no. 27/d-27/g); the sex scene between Lucy and Dracula in the park being watched by Mina being caught in shock and horror and finally being x-rayed by Dracula's gaze showing the red of desire also inside her (illustrations no. 27/h-27/j); and Dracula threatening to undermine Victorian society by arousing female sexual desires while his sarcastically and viciously laughing ice-blue face is shown against a black sky looking in through Lucy's bedroom window in the scene blending Mina's wedding and Lucy's death (illustrations no. 27/k-27/p).

By the end of the film the Ice-like Blue of Dracula's spiritual power has become the dominant tone of Blue: Dracula's spiritual power forcing the uncontrolled on Victorian society and masterminding its consequences has taken controll. In contrast to the coded Red the tones of Blue do not form a circle. This defines Blue as the subordinate colour compared to Red, and consequently, indicate the defeat of the controlled by the uncontrolled. Accordingly, the Night Blue of Victorian (social) controll and the light sky-like Blue of balanced mind and emotion have disappeared by Mina's and Harker's return to London after their wedding.

V. Conclusion

The coded colours in Coppola's Bram Stoker's Dracula define all varieties of the controlled as extremes leading into (social) disaster: The neglect of sensuality makes humans more ready for sensual attractions of all

sorts. The (social) concept of an uncompromising command of the controlled over the uncontrolled is shown to have turned out to be a disastrous failure.

Together with the end of the film the colours present devoting love in which sensuality has its share as the prevailing concept of a balanced human existence. This is the essence of Coppola's interpretation of Stoker's Victorian novel as a morality play putting the clash of cultural extremes on the cinematic stage. Being attached to significant imagery and scenes both the coded Red and the coded Blue lead audiences through this conceptual structure of the film step by step: Introducing the basic thematical links first, extending the links to the central theme next, serving as the visualized red threat for the rest of the film, and concluding on the thematical structure in the final shot. The composition of the film is essentially, however, not exclusively provided by the colours in this way.

Illustrations

All illustrations refer to Bram Stoker's Dracula (DVD). The Collector's Edition. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola; screenplay by James V. Hart; produced by Francis Ford Coppola, Fred Fuchs, Charles Mulvehill; executive producers Michael Apted, Robert O'Connor; Gary Oldman (Dracula), Winona Ryder (Willhelmina Murray-Harker/ Elisabeta), Anthony Hopkins (Dr. Van Helsing), Keanu Reeves (Jonathan Harker), Sadie Frost (Lucy Westenra); an American Zoetrope/ Osiris films production; copyright 1992 Columbia Pictures Industries Inc.; distributed by Sony Pictures Home Entertainment GMBH, Ickstattstr. 1, 80469 Munich.

Their appearance in the film is documented on the timeline integrated at the bottom of the images.

The Circle of Red

The Red of Threat, Violence, and (Violent) Death



Illustration no. 1



Illustration no. 2



Illustration no. 3



Illustration no. 4

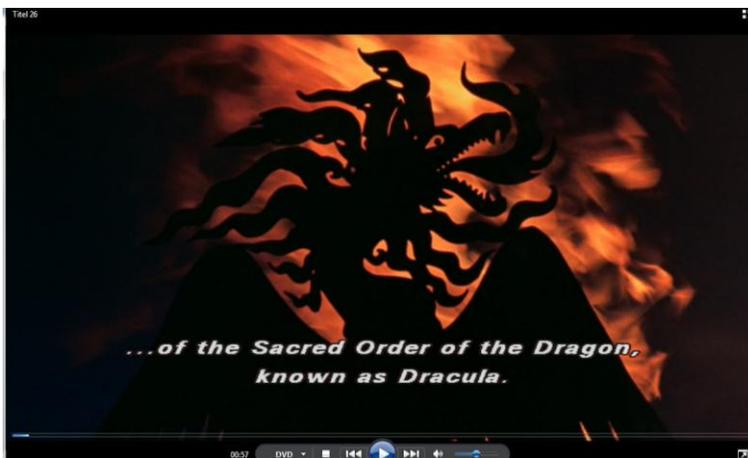
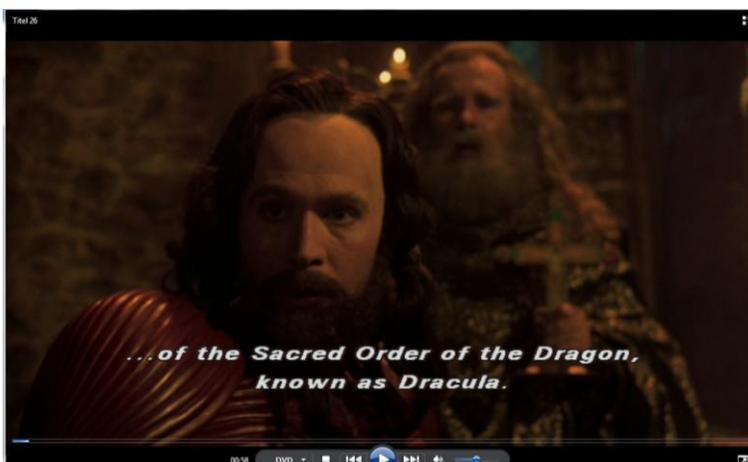


Illustration no. 5



Illustraion no. 6

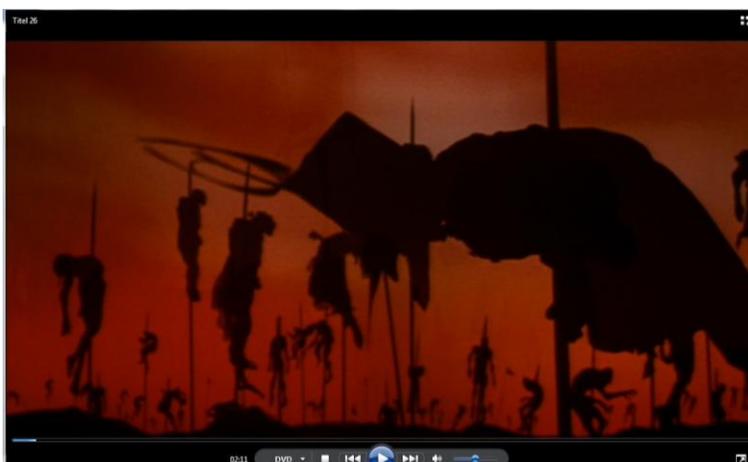


Illustration no. 7



Illustration no. 8



Illustration no. 9

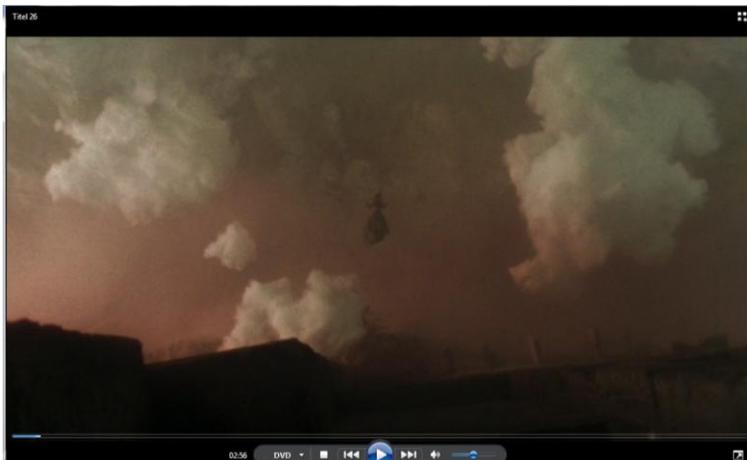


Illustration no. 10



Illustration no. 11

The Bright Cherry Red of life owed to (sacrilegious) sin



Illustration no. 12



Illustration no. 13



Illustration no. 14



Illustration no. 15



Illustration no. 16

The wine Red of an Dracula's intact religious status



Illustration no. 17

Harker's journey East (the Red of Threat)

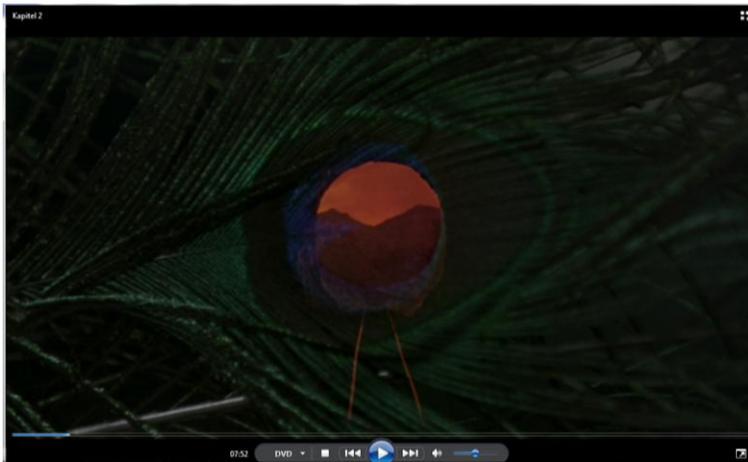


Illustration no. 18/a

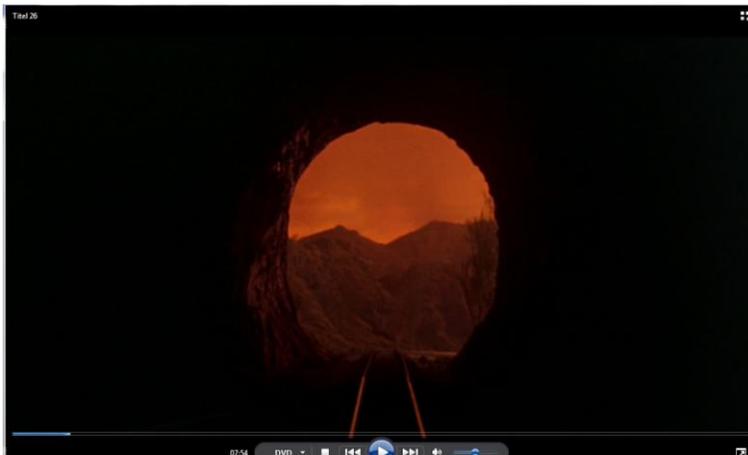


Illustration no. 18/b



Illustration no. 18/c



Illustration no. 18/d

Harker's seduction scene



Illustration no. 19/a



Illustration no. 19/b

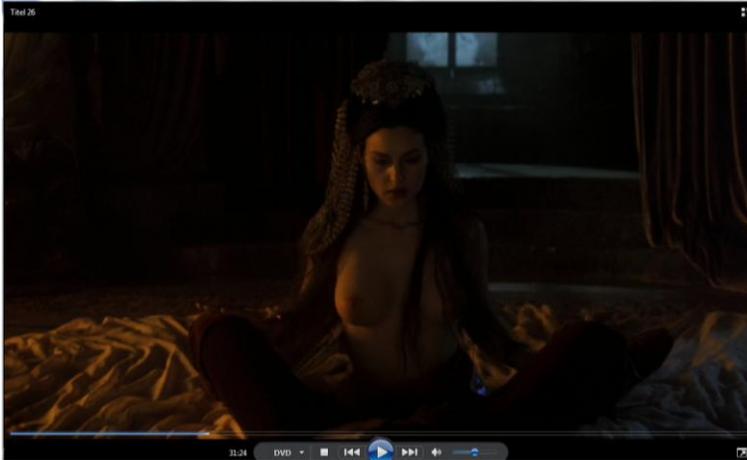


Illustration no. 19/c

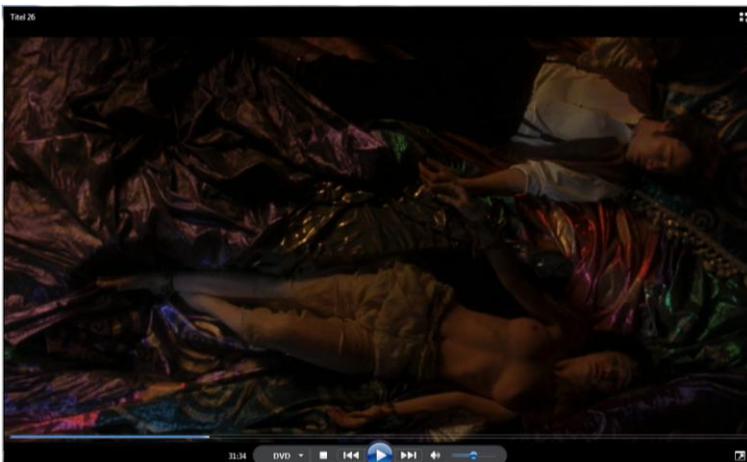


Illustration no. 19/d



Illustration no. 19/e



Illustration no. 19/ f



Illustration no. 19/g



Illustration no. 19/h

Vampirized Lucy (the merge of the coded tones of Red)



Illustration no. 20/a



Illustration no. 20/b



Illustration no. 20/c



Illustration no. 20/d

Lucy's and Dracula's sex scene (the extension of cherry red to Lucy)



Illustration no. 21/a



Illustration no.21/b



Illustration no. 21/c



Illustration no. 21/d



Illustration no. 21/e

Dracula's welcome for Harker (cherry Red as Dracula's coded tone of Red)



Illustraion no. 22/a



Illustration no.22/b



Illustration no. 22/c

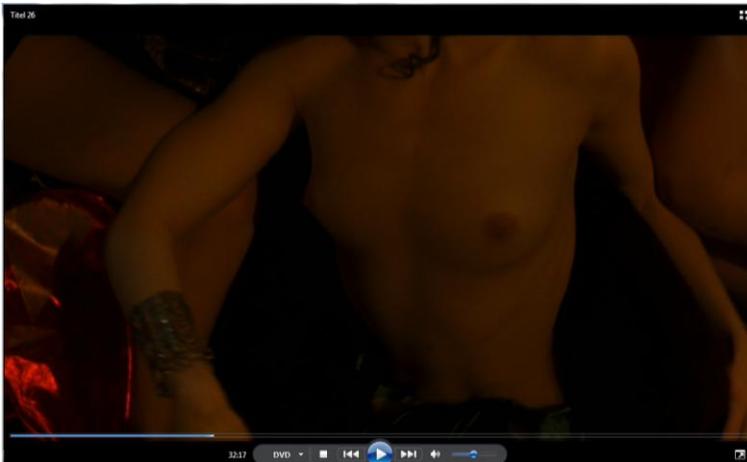


Illustration no. 19/ f



Illustration no. 19/g



Illustration no. 19/h

Vampirized Lucy (the merge of the coded tones of Red)



Illustration no. 20/a



Illustration no. 20/b



Illustration no. 20/c



Illustration no. 20/d

Lucy's and Dracula's sex scene (the extension of cherry red to Lucy)



Illustration no. 21/a



Illustration no.21/b



Illustratin no. 21/c



Illustration no. 21/d



Illustration no. 21/e

Dracula's welcome for Harker (cherry Red as Dracula's coded tone of Red)



Illustration no. 22/a



Illustration no.22/b



Illustration no. 22/c



Illustration no. 22/d

Harker's and Dracula's Dinner Scene



Illustration no.22/e



Illustration no. 22/f



Illustration no. 22/g



Illustration no. 22/h

Mina's Wedding and Lucy's Death



Illustration n. 23/a



Illustration 23/b



Illustration no. 23/c



Illustration no. 23/d



Illustration no. 23/e



Illustraion no. 23/f



Illustration no. 23/g

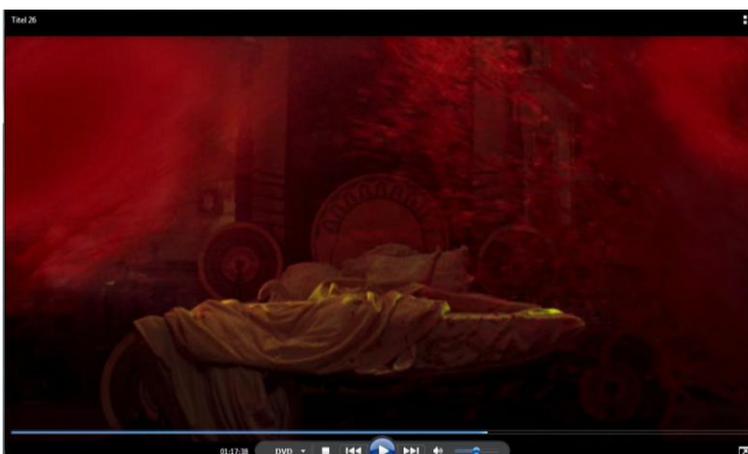


Illustration no. 23/h



Illustration no. 23/i

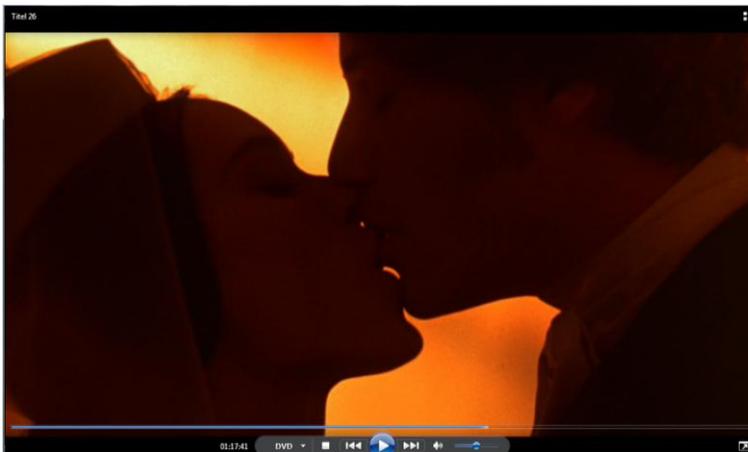


Illustration no. 23/j

The salvation scene



Illustration no. 24/a



Illustration no. 24/b



Illustration no. 24/c



Illustration no. 24/d



Illustration no. 24/e



Illustration no. 24/ f



Illustration no. 24/g

The Blue of Night, Ice and Sky

The Blue of Night



Illustration no. 25

The Blue of Sky



Illustration 26/a



Illustration no. 26/b



Illustration no. 26/c



Illustration no. 26/d



Illustration no. 26/e



Illustration no. 26/f



Illustration no. 26/g



Illustration no. 26/h



Illustration no. 26/i

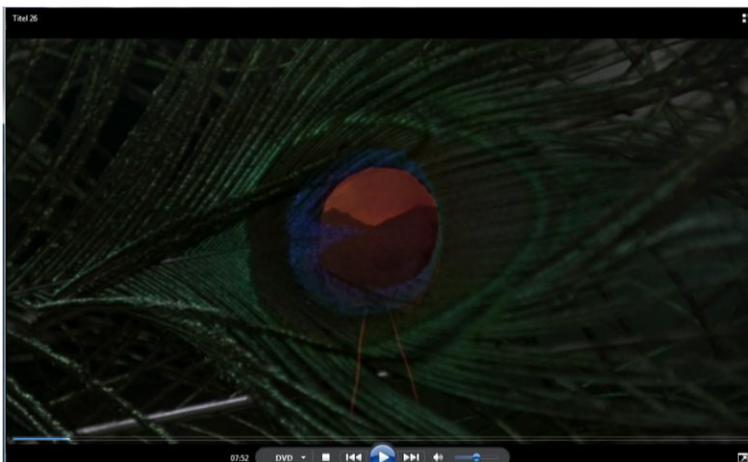


Illustration no. 26/j

The Blue of Ice



Illustration no. 27/a

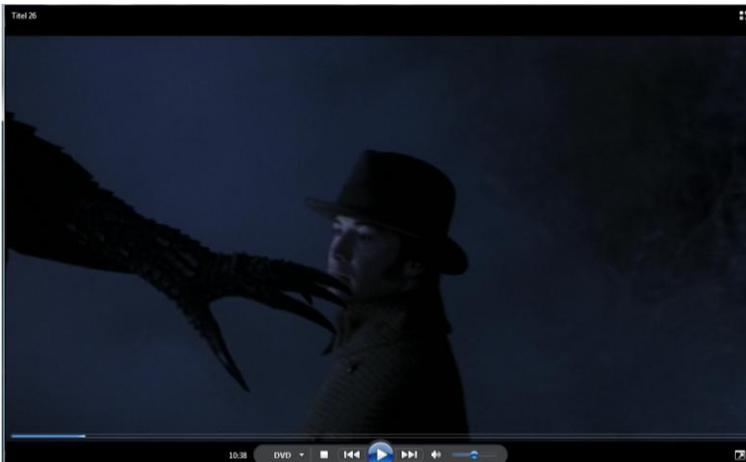


Illustration no. 27/b



Illustration no. 27/c

Mina's and Lucy's park scene



Illustration no. 27/d



Illustration no. 27/e



Illustration no. 27/f

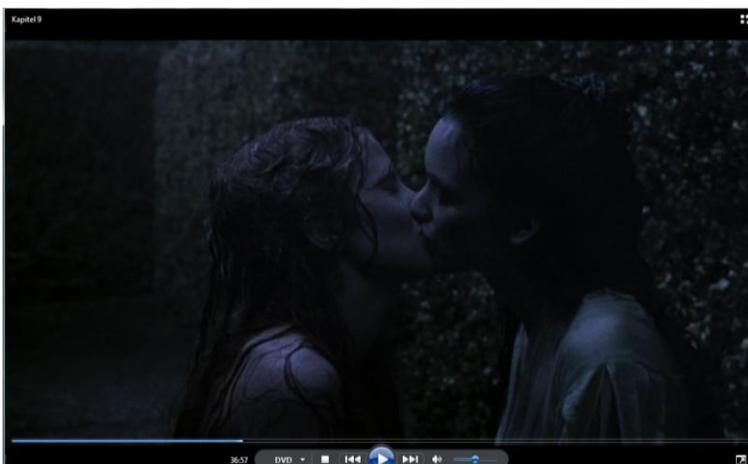


Illustration no. 27/g

Lucy's and Dracula's sex scene



Illustration no. 27/h



Illustration no.27/i



Illustration no.27/j

Mina's Wedding and Lucy's Death

Mina's Wedding and Lucy's Death



Illustration no. 27/k



Illustration no. 27/l



Illustration no. 27/m



Illustration no.27/ n



Illustration no.27/o



Illustration no. 27/p



Illustration 27/q



Illustration no. 27/r



Illustration no. 27/s

¹ For reviews on Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* see:
http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bram_Stoker%E2%80%99s_Dracula; <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Film-dienst>; http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lexikon_des_Internationalen_Films;
<http://www.zweitausendeins.de/filmlexikon/?wert=50010&sucheNach=titel>;
http://www.dieterwunderlich.de/Coppola_Dracula.htm; <http://www.mannbeisstfilm.de/kritik/Francis-Ford-Coppola/Bram-Stokers-Dracula/427.html>; http://www.amazon.de/product-reviews/B00004RYID/ref=dp_top_cm_cr_acr_txt?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1;
<http://www.moviepilot.de/movies/bram-stoker-s-dracula>; http://www.moviejones.de/kritiken/kritik-bram-stokers-dracula_1165.html; <http://www.filmzentrale.com/rezis/bramstokersdraculaq.htm>;
<http://www.filmering.at/kritik/9556-bram-stokers-dracula-1992>;
http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/bram_stokers_dracula/;

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dracula_\(1992_film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dracula_(1992_film)); <http://www.senseofview.de/review/55>;
<http://www.vampire-world.com/filmpages/einzelnefime/bramstokersdracula.htm>;
<http://reeseefilmreview.wordpress.com/2011/04/26/francis-ford-coppolas-bram-stokers-dracula-1992/>;
http://articles.latimes.com/1992-06-07/entertainment/ca-284_1_count-dracula;
http://articles.latimes.com/1992-11-15/entertainment/ca-662_1_count-dracula;
http://articles.latimes.com/1992-10-25/entertainment/ca-1098_1_coppola-movie;
http://articles.latimes.com/1992-11-08/entertainment/ca-42_1_dracula-films;
http://articles.latimes.com/1992-01-26/entertainment/ca-1125_1_bram-stoker;
http://articles.latimes.com/1992-06-07/entertainment/ca-284_1_count-dracula;
<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19921113/REVIEWS/211130301/1023>;
<http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9E0CE2D61539F930A25752C1A964958260>;
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,977025,00.html>;
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,977025,00.html#ixzz1QqYEPymm>;
<http://www.empireonline.com/reviews/reviewcomplete.asp?FID=15026>;
http://articles.latimes.com/1992-11-16/entertainment/ca-521_1_francis-ford-coppola;
<http://www.suite101.de/content/dracula---unterschiede-zwischen-der-vorlage-und-coppolas-film-a92443#ixzz1Ryl3w1au>. A more extensive film study has been provided in: „Augenweide am Auge des Maelstroms? – Francis Ford Coppola inszeniert Bram Stoker’s Dracula als den ewig jungen Mythos Hollywood“ by Thomas Elsaesser, In: Die Filmgespenster der Postmoderne, hg. V. A. Rost und M. Sandbothe, Frankfurt/ M 1998, 63-104.

For comments on the images see: http://www.dieterwunderlich.de/Coppola_Dracula.htm;
<http://www.mannbeisstfilm.de/kritik/Francis-Ford-Coppola/Bram-Stokers-Dracula/427.html>;
http://www.amazon.de/product-reviews/B00004RYID/ref=dp_top_cm_cr_acr_txt?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1;
<http://www.filmzentrale.com/rezis/bramstokersdraculag.htm>; <http://www.filmering.at/kritik/9556-bram-stokers-dracula-1992>; <http://www.vampire-world.com/filmpages/einzelnefime/bramstokersdracula.htm>;
<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19921113/REVIEWS/211130301/1023>;
<http://www.suite101.de/content/dracula---unterschiede-zwischen-der-vorlage-und-coppolas-film-a92443#ixzz1Ryl3w1au>.

For comments on the colours see <http://www.suite101.de/content/dracula---unterschiede-zwischen-der-vorlage-und-coppolas-film-a92443#ixzz1Ryl3w1au>

² Cf. Documentary: DRACULA: The Man, The Myth, The Legend on: Bram Stoker’s Dracula (DVD). Directed by Francis Ford Coppola; screenplay by James V. Hart; produced by Francis Ford Coppola, Fred Fuchs, Charles Mulvehill; executive producers Michael Apted, Robert O’Connor; Gary Oldman (Dracula), Winona Ryder (Willhelmina Murray-Harker/ Elisabeta), Anthony Hopkins (Dr. Van Helsing), Keanu Reeves (Jonathan Harker), Sadie Frost (Lucy Westenra). An American zoetrope Osiris films production copyright 1992 Columbia Pictures Industries Inc. Columbia Tristar homevideo, edited by Columbia Tristar Home Entertainment, 25 Golden Square London, W1F9LU, 2005, 3 min. 25 sec. – 4 min. 5 sec.

- ³ Cf. *ibid*, 4 min. 5sec. - 5min. 2sec. A literary studies analysis of cinematic adaptations of Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* has been provided in Gabriele Schmidhammer's MA paper "Literature in Film: Bram Stoker's *Dracula*", Innsbruck University (Diplomarbeit) 1997.
- ⁴ Documentary: DRACULA: The Man, The Myth, 4 min. 23sec - 4 min. 32 sec.
- ⁵ For further details on the Orient-Occident theme in Bram Stoker's novel see Veronika Bernard: "All Evil comes from the East. A Vampire and the Cholera as the Agents of an (East-born) Threat to Western Society in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*", in: Veronika Bernard, Serhan Oksay, Eugene Sensenig-Dabbous (Eds): *Breaking the Stereotype. From Orient and Occident to a Mutual Understanding of Images*, Innsbruck: iup 2011, 219 - 232.
- ⁶ For further details on the imperialist potential of Bram Stoker's novel see Bernard: "All Evil comes from the East".
- ⁷ The Bible, John, 6:54: „Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day" (<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+6&version=NIV>).
- ⁸ See Robert Ebert's review on <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19921113/REVIEWS/211130301/1023>; Vincent Canby's review on <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9E0CE2D61539F930A25752C1A964958260>; and the review on <http://reeseefilmreview.wordpress.com/2011/04/26/francis-ford-coppolas-bram-stokers-dracula-1992/>.
- ⁹ Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (DVD). Collector's Edition. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola; screenplay by James V. Hart; produced by Francis Ford Coppola, Fred Fuchs, Charles Mulvehill; executive producers Michael Apted, Robert O'Connor; Gary Oldman (*Dracula*), Winona Ryder (*Willhelmina Murray-Harker/ Elisabeta*), Anthony Hopkins (*Dr. Van Helsing*), Keanu Reeves (*Jonathan Harker*), Sadie Frost (*Lucy Westenra*); an American Zoetrope/ Osiris films production; copyright 1992 Columbia Pictures Industries Inc.; distributed by Sony Pictures Home Entertainment GMBH, Ickstattstr. 1, 80469 Munich, 00:39.
- ¹⁰ Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (DVD). Collector's Edition, 03:55-03:59.
- ¹¹ *Ibid*, 04:14-04:27.
- ¹² *Ibid*, 04:47.
- ¹³ *Ibid*, 19:12-19:44.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid*, 20:21-21:57.
- ¹⁵ The image of *Dracula*'s shadow moving along the walls is borrowed from J. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* of 1922.
- ¹⁶ Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (DVD), 01:01:08- 01:01:30. The review published on <http://www.filmzentrale.com/rezis/bramstokersdraculag.htm> points out that the shot showing the bottle with Absinthe catches exactly these letters of the Absinthe label which form the word "sin". This symbolic link is also supported by *Dracula* telling Mina that absinthe was the aphrodisiac of the self, and that the green fairy living in it wants your soul. The hint at the colour green in connection with calling absinthe the aphrodisiac of the self is significant because *Dracula* appears as light green fog when the married Mina longs for him in her dreams and he comes to see and vampirize her. This context given, the "trashfilmimage" associations of "later films of the genre" mentioned by one of the reviews on http://www.amazon.de/product-reviews/B00004RYID/ref=dp_top_cm_cr_acr_txt?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1 in terms of the green fog and bat *Dracula* has changed into can be neglected.

¹⁷ Bram Stoker's Dracula (DVD). Collector's Edition, 01:01:51-01:05.

¹⁸ Ibid, 01:45:05-01:47:28.

¹⁹ Ibid, 01:45:05-01:47:28.

²⁰ Ibid, 07:40-07:54.

²¹ Ibid, 01:12:13.

²² Ibid, 58:46-01:00:36.

²³ Ibid, 07:11-07:36.

²⁴ Ibid, 35:50-36:07.

²⁵ Ibid, 18:36-18:39, 19:12.

²⁶ Ibid, 09:18.

²⁷ Ibid, 43:30-45:43.

²⁸ Ibid, 01:45:05-01:47:28.

²⁹ Ibid, 01:49:17-01:50:30.

³⁰ Ibid, 01:52:30.

³¹ Ibid, 01:07.

³² Ibid, 01:28:00-01:29:00.

³³ Ibid, 01:32:00-01:37:48.

³⁴ Ibid, 08:13.

³⁵ Ibid, 08:33.

³⁶ Ibid, 05:49-06:13.

³⁷ Ibid, 09:24.

³⁸ Ibid, 09:30.

³⁹ Ibid, 09:47-09:51.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 10:54-10:58.

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