

2006

"The coin of our realm": Blood and Images in Dracula 2000

Alan S. Ambrisco
University of Akron, Ohio

Lance Svehla
University of Akron, Ohio

Follow this and additional works at: <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/dracula-studies>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), and the [Film and Media Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ambrisco, Alan S. and Svehla, Lance (2006) ""The coin of our realm": Blood and Images in Dracula 2000," *Journal of Dracula Studies*: Vol. 8: No. 1, Article 3.

DOI: 10.70013/72p7q8r9

Available at: <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/dracula-studies/vol8/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Research Commons at Kutztown University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Dracula Studies by an authorized editor of Research Commons at Kutztown University. For more information, please contact czerny@kutztown.edu.

"The coin of our realm": Blood and Images in Dracula 2000

Cover Page Footnote

Alan S. Ambrisco is an Associate Professor of English at The University of Akron. His research interests include medieval literature and the history of monsters. Lance Svehla is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Akron. He has published work in such journals as *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* and *College Literature*.

“The coin of our realm”: Blood and Images in *Dracula 2000*

Alan S. Ambrisco and Lance Svehla

[Alan S. Ambrisco is an Associate Professor of English at The University of Akron. His research interests include medieval literature and the history of monsters. Lance Svehla is an Associate Professor of English at The University of Akron. He has published work in such journals as *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* and *College Literature*.]

Who is this creature that walks as a man yet casts no reflection?
—Van Helsing, *Dracula 2000*

Since the publication of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, the vampire has always been our long lost twin, always held our gaze because we found ourselves translated there. Whether represented as demonized monopolist, stereotyped Jew, feudal aristocrat, or iconoclastic youth,¹ what remains in all manifestations of the vampire is its ability to become what the culture both desires and reviles, to seduce in the act of producing fear. *Wes Craven Presents: Dracula 2000*, a film directed by Patrick Lussier, portrays the notorious vampire reveling in a world not only of blood but also of images. This rewriting of Dracula’s legend engages anxieties about the place and nature of simulacra in postmodern culture. Translating Dracula from the cobblestone paths of the Old World to the asphalt streets of the New, *Dracula 2000* depicts Americans as vampiric consumers feeding on a culture drenched in postmodern iconography. The power and spectacle of these depictions, however, stem not only from a postmodern sensibility, but also from a counter discourse that undercuts a postmodern understanding of the image. In the film’s climax, Dracula sees through the “falseness” of the image to the truth that it merely represents, arguably turning the film’s use of spectacle from a Baudrillardian celebration of simulacra to a didactic lesson on the difference between essence and the ephemeral. Ultimately, Craven’s film questions the image’s cultural supremacy by attempting to teach its American audience to read through the image’s seductive power.

Commodification and the Birth of Dracula

Dracula 2000 begins at Carfax Abbey, now located inside a station of the London Underground. Here, Matthew Van Helsing, the aged “grandson” of the fabled Abraham Van Helsing, owns a thriving antique dealership with a “secret” lodged in the Abbey’s crypts. Van Helsing is aided by Simon, a young British man whom he saved from a past riddled with youthful indiscretions. Solina, an American assistant of Van Helsing’s, is ringleader of a group of American thieves who break through the Abbey’s defenses and steal a coffin they believe holds Van Helsing’s greatest treasures. Escaping onboard a jet to the Cayman Islands, they open the coffin and loose Dracula, who kills them and makes his way to New Orleans, directed there by a vision in which a young woman he seeks wears a shirt bearing that city’s name.

Van Helsing follows Dracula to America, and we find out he is actually Abraham Van Helsing, who, to keep Dracula imprisoned, has kept himself alive for nearly 100 years with injections of Dracula’s

¹ For these and other cultural uses of the vampire, see the following: Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago, U of Chicago P, 1995); and Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger, eds. *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1999).

blood. Sustained by the blood, Van Helsing has been attempting to discover the secret of Dracula's true origin, which he suspects goes far beyond that of a medieval warlord, and a way to prevent the monster's inevitable resurrection. Like Dracula, however, Van Helsing too has a secret: a daughter Mary, the same young woman Dracula saw in his vision. Years earlier, Mary's mother took her from England in an attempt to shield Mary from her father, but Mary still has Van Helsing's blood coursing through her veins and, as a result, Dracula's as well. Dracula and Van Helsing both attempt to get to their daughter first, and Dracula succeeds. Van Helsing is killed, and Mary is turned into a vampire. Still, with the help of Simon, she manages to destroy Dracula's body. Just prior to his death, Dracula releases Mary and the movie ends with Mary and Simon returning to London. Mary takes Van Helsing's last name, and the two watch over Dracula's remains should he ever revive.

Among its changes to the Dracula legend, *Dracula 2000* intriguingly traces the "origin" of the monster back further than the historical Vlad the Impaler, making Dracula none other than Judas Iscariot, who sold Christ for thirty silver coins and – in the film's narrative – was subsequently doomed by God to walk the earth as a vampire. Judas' treachery, undertaken for coin, is remembered as an economic transaction, one that resurfaces throughout the film when Dracula witnesses the commodification and consumption of human flesh in strip clubs, explicit videos, and during Mardi Gras itself.

Dracula's origin as Judas, moreover, is presented as a reconstructed memory that cannot be verified. When Van Helsing's historical research comes to naught, Dracula remembers his origin for us, never verified by the historical record, never corroborated by any source in the film. We only learn of this origin when Dracula bites Mary, and Judas' memories pass through him to her blood. Dracula's blood, later referred to as his "essence," contains the foundational origin of vampiric history, a history represented as true memory. What triggers Dracula's memories of Judas' betrayal is significant: the commodification of flesh, the jingling of coins, the sights and sounds of seedy commercialism. When Dracula proclaims that "Blood has always been the coin of our realm," he envisions a nation of vampires that is demarcated not by linguistic integrity or geographic borders but by adherence to a hedonistic lifestyle passed along bloodlines and defined in economic terms.

Pleasurable Consumption and the Vampiric Nation

Tropes of cannibalism and vampirism have long served to critique consumer culture and its effects. In an essay discussing the cannibal's role in early modern colonialism and commerce, Crystal Bartolovich suggests the cannibal emerged alongside incipient capitalism (207), and she writes that "Preoccupation with cannibals . . . is one of the morbid symptoms of capitalist appetite in crisis" (234). For Bartolovich, early modern travel narratives, replete with images of cannibals, figure cannibalism as a form of "exhaustive consumption" that must be eschewed "in the interest of proto-capitalist accumulation . . ." (215). In short, the desire to consume must be ever present but never sated: cannibalism, a short-sighted and indulgent form of absolute consumption, must give way to "the vampire, werewolf, or parasite, who continuously feeds off a living worker" (213). Critics labeling capitalism as cannibalistic, Bartolovich contends, make a crucial error, for "capitalism *must* be parasitic rather than cannibalistic" (214).

Recognizing this point, Franco Moretti reads Bram Stoker's *Dracula* as a novel that teaches its readers to accept capitalism but reject monopoly. Dracula, a monopolist who will "brook no competition," is demonized as a foreign aristocrat, severing connections between his endless thirst for the accumulation of capital and the empire building of the fearless vampire killers who fight to make capital safe for the English nation. Using Marx's description of capital as "dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor," (qtd. in Moretti 45) Moretti argues that Stoker's Dracula parasitically "sucks just as much [blood] as is necessary and never wastes a drop" (45). Dracula thus is "a saver, an ascetic, an upholder of the Protestant work ethic" who can never completely satisfy his lusts.

Unlike Stoker's monster, Craven's Dracula is not a monopolist, and in the year 2000 he prefers conspicuous consumption to monopolistic accumulation. At first, Dracula carefully drains and uses blood, but once restored to full strength, he gets messy, turning into a conspicuous consumer who sucks more than he needs, wastes life, revels in excess, and argues for an economy of limitless pleasure. In New

Orleans, he finds Mardi Gras in full swing and commercialism in full flower. Entering the Virgin Records Megastore, Dracula is met with the interested, gluttonous gazes of female staff members who wear t-shirts displaying the word “Virgin” writ large. Seeing Dracula, female shoppers holding CDs and records pause, caught *in flagrante*, and appraise him with greedy eyes. Dracula here is in his element, not so much walking as strutting with the assured stride of proprietary entitlement. America, which in its own originary myth locates itself as a nation of willing immigrants, embraces Dracula, who thrives in consumer culture and drops his pretensions to old world nobility. Nowhere in the film is he referred to as Count; he is simply a being who walks the stores of New Orleans, consuming.

Interested only in the excess of an economy based on symbolic exchange and electronic transactions, Dracula, like postmodern consumer culture itself, trades not in precious metals, goods, or services but in images and simulacra. After Dracula awakens one of the male thieves to an eternal life of pleasurable consumption, the new recruit claims, “It’s better than money.” The new Dracula/consumer of late capitalism, who consumes images as much as goods, can give up accumulation and parasitic restraint for the full appeasement of the consumer’s cannibalistic desires, a pleasure that monopolists renounce.

Like Stoker’s novel, *Dracula 2000* engages these economic metaphors by presenting both literal vampires created by Dracula and figurative “vampires” never identified as such because they lack fangs,² Van Helsing becomes a vampiric consumer of blood in an effort to fight Dracula, and Dracula converts a number of mortals into immortal, bloodsucking monsters. Early on, *Dracula 2000* also presents an undetected vampire in the guise of Solina, a cosmopolitan American woman who, while yet to gain her fangs, sinks her teeth into the Old World and sucks it dry. After she has been formally changed into a vampire, Solina taunts Simon: “You know why you never had me Simon? ’Cause you Brits like to sweet talk and you Brits like to romance, and all I wanna do is suck.” Her taunt draws attention to both her parasitic status and to her nationality. She has always already been an American vampire who draws sustenance from others.

We later see this metaphor expanded to suggest the vampiric nature of an entire nation of American consumers. In contrast to the youthful Americans Dracula sees in New Orleans, Europe itself is moribund and, like Van Helsing, aged though alive. When we see images of London, either in flashbacks to the nineteenth century or in the year 2000, it is always night, and the streets are nearly abandoned. In *Dracula 2000*, however, the streets of the New World, by day and by night, are brimming with vampires just waiting to be bitten, willing victims for whom the metaphoric lines between economic consumption and parasitic behavior have long since blurred. Whether he views the libidinal drama of Mardi Gras or the orgy of consumerism in the Virgin Records Megastore, Dracula sees an America of dizzying pleasure and vampiric consumption.

Thus, while Stoker’s Dracula expends capital to spread his realm to England, Craven’s Dracula comes to America and finds that his empire has already arrived. He finds a vampiric nation already built not on race, origin, religion, or even, any longer, ideology, but upon the consumption of the image for pleasure and identity. As Jean Baudrillard ironically proclaims, “The US is utopia achieved,” (*America* 77) but it is not achieved without anxiety, not without price. We live in an America where a person can make millions in tech stocks one day and find herself penniless the next, where CBN, MTV, and CNN coexist in the same basic cable package, where media images of utopia already achieved efface the material conditions that threaten that utopia. It is an America so saturated with media images and free floating signifiers that the distinction between the image and the real has collapsed. The technology meant to increase our control of the world has instead revealed the fragmentation of our lives. Here again, the vampire’s fluid and mimetic nature allows us to address cultural anxieties. Craven’s Dracula becomes a monstrous projection of America. No mere monopolist, Dracula is a post-Fordian capitalist eager to participate in an economy of symbolic exchange, eager to wade into a world of images and media. He

² According to Franco Moretti (49-50), the novel’s unacknowledged vampire is the one who is never perceived as being a monster, but who – like Dracula – must die before the novel can end: the American Quincey Morris. It is only when Quincey dies that the novel, and the economy, successfully resolves its problems.

offers Americans what they both desire and fear: images of themselves not only as desiring subjects that consume but also as seducing, consumable objects.

The Seductive Image, or the Pleasure of Being Consumed

If anything marks *Dracula 2000* as different from its film predecessors, it is imagery infused with a postmodern sensibility. Indeed, in a film with mediocre acting, a tortured plot, and questionable dialogue, the images in *Dracula 2000* never fail to fascinate. When Dracula, squatting gargoyle-like atop a building, first gazes down on the grotesque splendor of Mardi Gras, he is transfixed. An orgy of images assail him: garishly decorated floats, neon signs in a rainbow of colors, people of every race dressed in wild costumes, scantily clad bodies gyrating in drunken debauchery. When he jumps down to move through the crowd, the film fast-forwards like a VCR set to search, the images blurring into a hyperreal tapestry. For a moment, the film becomes film *qua* film, highlighting and collapsing the distinction between image and reality.

As Dracula continues through the crowd, he sees silhouettes of naked women lasciviously dancing, commodified shadows of flesh selling their wares in storefront windows. Reaching his destination – the Virgin Record Megastore – he stops to gaze at a music video playing on a giant screen built into the store’s front wall. The video, by the band Monster Magnet, is a homage to postmodern imagery and style. Lightning fast yet random edits move from one unrelated image to another. Scenes of the band playing are mixed with images of sadomasochism, nuclear explosions, assembly line production, warfare, classical theater, mud wrestling, and sexual fetishes. These images, torn from multiple historical contexts, are not related to any theme in the video. They do not function as a critique of war or violence or hedonism. They are simply a collage of sights and sounds and horrors meant to entertain through the pleasure of spectacle. Bewitched by the video, Dracula utters the simple, appreciative comment “brilliant.” Brilliant because video culture understands that there is no space outside of the flow of images from which a critique can or should be made. Images are to be consumed – not criticized, analyzed, or even understood.

The film’s refiguring of the power Dracula’s gaze asserts over others also underscores its postmodern sensibility. In previous films, the power of Dracula’s gaze stemmed from a glamorized exertion of personal will, from a kind of supreme agency not bound by social mores or cultural constraints. In *Dracula 2000*, however, it comes not from his enhanced subjectivity but from his ability to reflect back an image of his victims as desirable objects. They do not so much desire Dracula as they are seduced by their own image. For example, news reporter and vampire-to-be Valerie Sharpe worries more about how she looks on camera than about the quality of her work. Wearing a clinging dress that reveals ample cleavage, she seductively tells her audience to “turn me on at eleven. . . .” While filming the wreckage of a downed airplane, she asks her cameraman “You getting the crash? Getting the sunset? Getting the tits?” She then warns her audience that she has “shocking footage of the presumed pilot. Sensitive viewers may want to turn away.” Her videotape then glories in the pilot’s body, lashed around and through by cockpit cables and pipes. Valerie understands the value of the image to shock, to exhilarate, and to create identity. Hence, when Dracula bites her it is less a transformation than a fulfillment of what she already values – the power of the image to seduce.

This obsession with and vulnerability to how one is perceived is an extension of the shift in identity caused by postmodernity, a shift away from the sanctity of subjectivity to a fascination with object status. Stating that “We have always lived off the splendor of the subject and the poverty of the object,” Baudrillard forcefully reminds us that “we are objects as much as subjects” (*Fatal Strategies* 111, 124). We are not only entities that think, desire, measure, judge, and feel; we are also entities that are thought, desired, measured, judged, and felt. And “what we all want as objects . . . is not to be hallucinated and exalted as a subject . . . but rather to be taken profoundly as object” (124). Postmodern identity comes not simply from an ability to consume but from our status as something valuable to be consumed. The fulfillment of this want is what Dracula’s gaze, the embodiment of consumer culture, offers its American victims: not merely the promise of eternal youth, not merely a culture of consumption

that will keep them forever young, but an enhanced object status. “It is a special thing to be chosen,” Solina says after being bitten. “It feels like being born.”

The film’s postmodern sensibility can also be seen in its effacement of the difference between image and reality, the most dramatic instance of which occurs in Mary’s dreams/hallucinations/visions of Dracula. Mary’s dreams of Dracula, which come in disjointed, MTV-like flashes, are more real to her than her real life. When she kisses Dracula in a dream that image suddenly comes to life, and she is actually kissing him within the narrative of the story. When the image of Dracula standing in the doorway of a plane becomes an image of Dracula standing in the doorway of Mary’s room, he is suddenly there in the film’s reality as he grasps her and whispers, “Mary, you *are real*.”

Perhaps the film’s most postmodern moments, however, come from its tacit acceptance of history’s exhaustion. According to Baudrillard, we live in an era where “history has stopped, one is in a kind of post-history which is without meaning” (*Selected Interviews* 95). What has disappeared is not so much history as the need for a historical consciousness to make sense out of current phenomena. Images can be taken from one context, both in terms of time and place, and injected into another without causing perceptual dissonance, creating “a hyperreal scenario in which events lose their identity and signifiers fade into one another” (Patton 2). Seemingly accepting this exhaustion, the film tears images, individuals, and themes from their historical contexts solely to create a sense of spectacle. The music video that Dracula watches takes images from the Holocaust, nuclear testing, the Fordian revolution, World War I, and S&M clubs, splicing them into an assault of images with no need of a historical consciousness to experience them. The film recasts Dracula into an amalgamation of historical, fictional, and biblical characters. He is at once a historical figure who ruled Wallachia, a fictional vampire from Transylvania, and an apostle who betrayed Christ. This mixing of historical, fictional, and biblical characters with no regard for context – historical, religious, or otherwise – is strikingly postmodern. The film’s images do not require an actual or accurate referent to signify but only the logic of their own system of simulation, a hyperreality where representation “is no longer a question of imitation” but “a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself” (Baudrillard, *Simulations* 4). Thus, when Van Helsing tells his assistant Matthew, “Now, whatever you see, remember your sanity. What you see is real,” he underscores the self-validating nature of the image in a culture that neither expects nor requires a context for that image.

If the film’s use of imagery stopped here, therefore, we could safely tuck *Dracula 2000* away as a postmodern retelling of the Dracula legend, a film whose imagery is produced through what Fredric Jameson calls “the random cannibalization of . . . the past” (18). The film’s use of imagery, however, is much more complicated. Indeed, its use of imagery undercuts and may even ultimately reject a postmodern understanding of the image.

The Vampire in the Mirror

Throughout the film, Dracula and his antagonist Van Helsing are obsessed with essences. Van Helsing speaks fervently of his search for patient zero, the original vampire who “created” the others and cannot be killed. To contain patient zero, i.e., Dracula, Van Helsing imprisons him in a silver casket, complete with crucifixes, chains, and leeches designed to suck “the essence” from Dracula’s body. Using a syringe, Van Helsing then extracts that essence from the leech and injects it into his arm, artificially extending his own life. In one of the film’s most startling images, Van Helsing is portrayed as a drug addict awash in the ecstasy of a fix, needle tracks from previous fixes crisscrossing his arm. Through this scene we learn why Dracula is obsessed with Mary. He seeks the woman he considers his *true* offspring – a being he refers to as “a soul not bitten but born.” Dracula’s essence was supposedly passed on to Mary through Van Helsing, a transference recognized by the film’s other female vampires, who jealously acknowledge Mary is “the one” because she has “the essence.”

Obviously, this obsession with essence is most un-postmodern. In the age of the simulacrum, the search for the essence behind the image, the copy, the reflection is not only ridiculous but also meaningless. Yet this conflict between the image and the essence is at the heart of the film’s didactic

intent. While the film embraces the playfulness and spectacle of the postmodern image to retell and refigure the story of Dracula, its ethos remains solidly Platonic. The film not only attempts to teach a postmodern audience how to read through the image to the essence it merely represents, but also repeatedly warns of the dangers in failing to do so. Indeed, with the exception of Mary, the failure of the film's main characters to read the difference between the image and the essence continually results in catastrophe.

Dracula's inability to discern the difference between image and essence is what allows Van Helsing to capture him. In a flashback, we learn that Van Helsing captured Dracula by placing a mirror in a dead-end alley so that Dracula, whose image cannot be seen, perceives the pursuing Van Helsing as ahead of, rather than behind, him. Mistaking Van Helsing's image for reality, Dracula pauses to enjoy the moment of his great enemy's defeat but is instead caged and pierced with silver tipped spears.

Ironically, a failure to distinguish image and essence leads to Van Helsing's death when Dracula uses the mirror trick against him. Van Helsing, seeing his own reflection in a mirror but not Dracula's, is captured and killed, causing Dracula to comment, "beaten by your own reflection." The erstwhile doctor turned entrepreneur does not see that he has become a vampire, the new kind of capitalist Jameson describes, one – like Dracula – not averse to enjoying the profits of symbolic exchange. While discussing a new acquisition with his assistant Simon, Van Helsing states that he wants to keep the piece for his private collection rather than resell it. At first Simon balks at this, but Van Helsing sternly replies, "We turn a profit, do we not? I will keep what I wish." By holding a mirror up to Dracula, Van Helsing achieved the vampire's capture, but that same device reveals his own nature as a peddler in the postmodern economy of symbolic exchange.

While Dracula and Van Helsing both suffer because of their inability to distinguish between image and essence, Judas suffers the most from this hermeneutic inadequacy. Judas' sin was the sin of idolatry. His sin was to value the image of value over the true essence of value. He sells Christ for an image – thirty pieces of silver, money being the beginning of an economy based on symbolic exchange rather than true value. This failure to distinguish between image and essence is why Judas, when he becomes Dracula, values the flesh over the soul, the blood of victims over the blood of Christ, the frenzied postmodern image over reality. He continually values the ephemeral and so repeatedly manifests Judas' sin. For example, Catholic iconography in the film cannot kill, and does not actually hurt, Dracula. Instead, it only irritates or enrages him. He is able to walk into a church, stand under a painting of the Last Supper, destroy crosses held up to him, perform a ritual beneath a giant neon crucifix, and dismiss the power of the Bible as propaganda. Dracula believes he can do these things because the images are a lie, the promises of a distant and uncaring God. The images *are* false, but they are false not because God lies but because they are merely symbols of a greater truth he cannot read.

There are other moments, however, when Judas, impelled by the doubling and, thus, increasingly ephemeral nature of images, seems almost to penetrate their "false" nature. When Dracula pauses to enjoy the silhouettes of naked women dancing, Judas' memory of silver coins bouncing on the ground flashes on the screen. Significantly, this moment of guilt follows Dracula's confrontation with a strained image. The silhouettes of the women dancing are an image of an image. Bodies are merely the housings of soul, and these naked bodies, seen only as silhouettes, are merely shadowy reflections of that housing. They are, so this line of argument goes, copies of a copy of an essence. The film uses such moments to highlight the distinction between Dracula and Judas, namely that the former conflates image and essence, while the latter often displays some partial knowledge of the difference. It is as if the straining of the image almost awakens in Judas the answer to the lesson he has yet to learn. To redeem himself and destroy Dracula, he must read through the ephemeral and false nature of the image.

Conclusion: Before the Crucifix, Behind the Image

The climax of the film takes place beneath the eyes of a twenty-foot tall neon crucifix. After converting Mary to vampirism, Dracula binds Simon and prepares to sacrifice him. Standing before the image of Christ, Judas argues that the punishment he has received is unfair, that his previous actions were

predestined, thereby rendering his punishment unjust. He tells the image, “It was my destiny to betray you – because you needed me. Now I drink the blood of your children, but I give them more than just eternal life. I give them what they crave most – all the pleasure you deny them, forever.” He pauses, laughs, and then continues: “You made the world in your image. Now I make it in mine.”

In the film’s climax, Mary asks to be the one to bite and then kill Simon. When the moment comes to kill him, however, Mary reveals that she has feigned loyalty and attacks Dracula. As they battle, the crucifix is knocked down and part of it hangs over the building’s edge. Entangling Dracula/Judas in the crucifix’s wires, Mary throws him over the building. He hangs from the crucifix, mimicking an earlier scene in which Judas attempted suicide for betraying Christ. Dangling over the edge of the building, Dracula/Judas comes to a revelation. Looking up into the image of Christ, he sees the crucifix’s shattered arms, sparks of electricity, and the image itself flickering. Here, the imagery is finally – literally and figuratively – pushed to its breaking point. This crucifix is not only an image of Christ; it is a neon image of an image, at least two removes from the actual being of Christ (three if we consider that this is a film image). As light breaks through the clouds, he sees what he has never seen before – that the image is not the thing itself, but a copy of a copy. In that moment of revelation and with the halo of Christ hanging over his own head, Judas finds redemption. He releases Mary from his possession and is forgiven. After some 2000 years, he is allowed to die, disintegrating in flame. The difference between the essence that was Judas and the image that was Dracula is *then* emphasized in Mary’s final speech: “Long ago Judas Iscariot tried to die for his sins, but he was denied. Today the rope did not break, and he was burned in the first light of the dawn. I am now the keeper of what remains. If the soul of Dracula still flickers in his ashes, I will keep it forever contained.” Mary’s words here syntactically accomplish what the narrative has already revealed: the severing of Judas, the essence, from Dracula, the image. In using the phrase “soul of Dracula,” however, she also broaches the contradictory possibility that the Baudrillardian image – itself already severed from history and context – has a soul, a center, an essence. Image and essence fold back on one another, and “what remains” is irreducibly indeterminate.

As we have seen, *Dracula 2000* is replete with allusions to and especially images of originary narratives with nationalistic, religious, and often economic significance. Craven’s text abounds with biblical names, including Simon, Mary, Matthew, Judas, and Abraham; the wall of Van Helsing’s study is adorned with a portrait of St. George, dragon-killer and patron saint of England; and stained-glass images of the Last Supper fill the windows of the church where Dracula hunts. Stoker’s novel too serves as an uneasy origin for the film, which dramatizes scenes from the novel in which Dracula first arrives in the London of 1897 and parallels them to his arrival in New Orleans a century later.

And yet, these narratives of origin are problematic. Dracula, trying to seduce Mary’s friend Lucy, proclaims that “we are all so much more complicated than our names,” and the significance of giving characters Biblical names is questioned when Lucy tells him she was named after the *Peanuts* character. These moments remind us that lines of filiation – whether among characters or texts – are alternately maintained and parodied in the film, which anxiously returns to originary moments and fantasies, all the while calling them into question.

The film thus repeatedly invokes the postmodern beliefs that origin is irrelevant, context is meaningless, history is dead, and image is all. But, as we have shown, these postmodern tenets are not consistently adhered to in the film. In fact, the film’s climactic scene has Judas rejecting the postmodern image on which Dracula’s allure depends. Hanging from the neon crucifix, Dracula/Judas sees behind the image, and in his final moments he declares to Mary, “I release you,” presumably liberating her from his vampiric nation precisely at the moment he trades image for essence, Dracula for Judas. This reading, however, is complicated by a final scene showing Mary back in the corridors of the Van Helsing family business. In a voiceover, we learn that she will continue her father’s work, watching over the remains of Dracula, and as this happens, her eyes light up in a supernatural fashion. But if she has not been made human again, then from what is she released? And if she is human, why is there a light in her eyes?

Caught between two fathers in a struggle with racial, economic, and imperialistic resonances, Mary is a hybrid figure whose multiple inheritances ensure her survival. She may harbor “the essence” within her blood, but not – as Dracula thinks – unaltered, unmingled, unmutated. She alone can remember

the dream of origin without attempting to regain that origin, and while Dracula, Judas, and Van Helsing are all obsessed with the past, Mary is able to consolidate her power and freewill in the present.

While Mary's hybrid status allows her to dispatch Dracula, the vampiric nation of American consumers is not defeated. Those idolatrous revelers are simply dropped from the film, presumably continuing to worship the image, drained of its meaning, its significance, its blood. In Stoker's novel, the death of all vampires – literal and figurative – was necessary for the containment of monopoly's destructive ideology. In *Dracula 2000*, however, the hermeneutic anxieties surrounding the place of the image in postmodern culture are never wholly resolved or contained. Though Dracula dies and Judas learns to read, America's idolatrous pursuit of the image is never completely abandoned, and Mary's eyes themselves become a questionable icon, a sign pointing to a vampiric nature that may or may not lurk beneath them.

Thus, in arguing that this film has a didactic intent, we do not mean to imply either that such an intent is achievable or achieved in the film. Indeed, whatever the film's intent, the cultural anxieties it engages, consciously or unconsciously, remain embedded in the film's narrative. Whether or not it is possible to pierce the image to attain the essence, whether or not the film successfully teaches its audience to perform this interpretive act, or even whether or not essences exist, the film is consciously aware of and attempts to manipulate a postmodern sensibility while simultaneously undercutting it. It both participates in and resists postmodernity.

"Blood has always been the coin of our realm," Dracula declares, leaving the word "our" open to multiple interpretations that refer to a realm he could alternately possess with Mary, Judas, Christ, or America itself. Similarly, blood itself is ambiguous in the film, evoking negative and positive connotations, sacrificial and salvific narratives. If the blood of Dracula is his "essence," then the images of postmodern culture are just that, images, and they should not be mistaken for the essences they represent. If essences do not exist, then both Dracula and Judas remain simulacra upon which our culture projects uncertainties about identity and futile desires for an origin that bestows concrete, intrinsic worth. While Judas seemingly learned his lesson, redeeming himself through an act of reading, *Dracula 2000* does not project an America that has thoroughly learned that same lesson. Having moved from an economy based on material exchange to one based on symbolic exchange, America worries that, like Van Helsing, it too has been beaten by its own reflections, its own images, by the translations of itself that capture and captivate it.

Works Cited

- Bartolovich, Crystal. "Consumerism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Cannibalism." *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*. Eds. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1998. 204-37.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *America*. Trans. Chris Turner. London: Verso, 1988.
- . *Baudrillard Live: Selected Interviews*. Ed. Mike Gane. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- . *Fatal Strategies*. Trans. Philip Beitchman and W.G.J. Niesluchowski. Ed. Jim Fleming. New York: Semiotext(e), 1990.
- . *Simulations*. Trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman. New York: Semiotext(e), 1983.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke U P, 1991.
- Moretti, Franco. "Dracula and Capitalism." Glennis Byron, *Dracula: Bram Stoker*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. 43-54. From *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*. Trans. Susan Fischer, David Forgacs, and David Miller. London: Verso, 1983. 83-85, 90-98.
- Patton, Paul. Introduction. *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. Trans. Paul Patton. Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1995. 1-21.
- Wes Craven Presents: Dracula 2000*. Dir. Patrick Lussier. Perf. Johnny Lee Miller, Justine Waddell, Jennifer Esposito. 2000. Videocassette. Dimension Home Video, 2001.