

## Panel 2 – Historical and Other Contexts

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[See table of contents](#)

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**Horror Reverie I:**  
**A Symposium Celebrating 100 Years of *Nosferatu***

**TRANSCRIPT**

**Panel 2 - Historical and Other Contexts**  
**19 February 2022**  
**(duration 52:03)**

**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

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**00:00- Erica Tortolani**

Alright. So hello, everyone. My name is Erica Tortolani. And this is the second panel on the historical and other contexts of *Nosferatu*. Just a brief shameless plug before we begin, if any of you are interested in additional horror scholarship, which I'm assuming so if you're in this symposium, some of my work has been or will be published in an edited volume called *Bloody Women: Women Directors of Horror* co-edited by Victoria McCollum, and Aislinn Clark [Lehigh University Press]. So that's coming out next month, and it should be available on ebook as well. So, yeah, that's, uh, let's go ahead and get started. I believe we're just going to go in alphabetical order. We are going to start with Steve Choe. Also, just a reminder to when we do break out with q&a, just please go ahead and put it in the direct message, please. All right. So Steve Choe is an associate professor of Critical Studies in the School of Cinema at San Francisco State University. He is the author of *Afterlives: Allegories of film and mortality in early Weimar Germany*, *Sovereign Violence: ethics and South Korean cinema in the new millennium*, *Refocus: the films of William Friedkin*. He is also a co editor of *Beyond Imperial Aesthetics: Theories of art and politics in East Asia*. So welcome, Steve.

**01:36 - Steve Choe**

Thank you, Erica. I'm going to share my screen. Hope that that will work. Okay, so I'd like to take a sequence from *Nosferatu* actually mentioned briefly in the first panel and generate some historical themes concerning film form contagion and the body

politic. Let me begin with an inner title that quickly takes us into the significant sequence. Professor Bulwer is researching the mysterious secrets of nature with his students. He's shown in a seminar room in Wisborg surrounded by his students, he gestures for them to gather around directing their attention toward a small wooden box of soil sitting on his desk. Soil derived from Orlok's homeland. Nosferatu cuts to a close up of a fly crawling around a carnivorous plant. As a small insect lingers around its menacing leaves. The Fly suddenly triggers the small hairs on its lobes and snaps the trap shut, Murnau cuts to a close up of Bulwer's face and remarks with a sly look "Like a vampire, no?" The film then cuts to another location to an asylum where the vampire servant the real estate agent Knock is locked up. With this juxtaposition the film brings shots of disease infested coffins and Bulwer's botanical demonstration in correspondence with a shock of Knock's increasing agitation. The one is seemingly instigating the other. Sitting in a cell Knock laughs crazily and swats at the air for flies, nervously, putting them into his mouth, bizarrely becoming the venus flytrap of Bulwer's experiment. The film then cuts back to the classroom. Bulwer motions for his students to gather even closer while remarking "And this one here..." and gesturing toward an elongated polyp with tentacles. In extreme close up it is shown suspended in dark water as one might observe under a microscope illuminated such that its body is nearly transparent, almost ethereal, the organism almost takes the appearance of a letter on a page, a provocation, perhaps that the image itself be read as a living signifier. A more miniscule life form suddenly enters the frame and begins to flit around the polyp. After a few moments, the creature becomes entangled in the larger organism's tentacles, and as it struggles to break free, the slender finger-like members of the predator pull its prey towards its ostensible mouth. [*Sound cuts out*] ... subdued by the psychiatric guard position behind him. The real estate agent looks up and points towards one of the corners of the room exclaiming "Spiders!" Murnau shows us a close up of the spider shot in the same manner as the polyp, phantom like against the dark background. It's in the process of spinning a net around the small fly, apparently the one that Knock had earlier sought. So on holy earth, spiders, vampires, carnivorous plants, a microscopic polyp, the real estate agent Knock, and spectral phantoms form a series of vampiric correspondences that Bulwer happened to be investigating. Correspondences = that are forged through cross cutting. Distances between here and there are overcome, borders are transgressed. Highlighted in the lives of the organisms here, depicted here, is their shared vampiric capacities made possible through their particular species specific morphology and their individual will toward life. Orlok's grasping fingers may be compared to the grasping tentacles of the tiny polyp. The poisonous bite of the Nosferatu is like the bite of the spider.

Furthermore, the fang-like mouth of the horrifying flytrap is akin to the teeth of the spider, each constituting a specific mode of existence that render them Other to the human being. In this sense, these correspondences recall Jakob von Uexküll's theory of the organism, elaborated in a text published in 1920 called *Theoretical Biology and the phenomenon of congruence between the morphology of the organism and the umvelt that enables its life to flourish*. From these vampiric beings depicted in *Nosferatu*, we see that the fangs, tentacles, and mouths are designed to consume the life of the Other in order to continue living.

### 06:24

The image of Orlok as a carrier of disease and a threat to the body politic of Wisborg persists throughout *Nosferatu*. Cultural studies approaches remind us of the representation of the vampire myth and Murnau's film, and its association with anti-semitic stereotypes of the Eastern Jew, including notions of degeneracy and parasitism. As we know, the stigmatization of Jews intensified after the war in Germany, as their increasing integration into society seem to compel evermore integrate conspiratorial theories that distinguish ostensibly essential racial differences. The association between encroaching contagion and the vampire can also be contextualized, of course, with the pandemic, the so-called Spanish flu that spread across the globe between 1918 and 1919. As a consequence of new means of transporting people and commodities across borders, as well as the close quarters of trench warfare. This massive H1N1 pandemic killed tens of millions of people. A striking shot from *Nosferatu* shows a procession of pall-bearers, coffins on their shoulders, marching through Wisborg to the cemetery while the living remains quarantined in their homes. The notion of the contaminated body politic finds its historical correspondence with texts such as Karl Binding's *Zum Werden und Leben der Staaten* and Eberhard Dennert's *Der Staat als lebendiger Organismus*, both published in 1920. In this year Uexküll published his biology of the state, *Anatomy physiology pathology of the state*, where he applies his theories of the organism to the functioning of the whole nation. In it he describes a chain of individuals who collaborate their specific abilities in conjunction with their *umvelt* to produce bread. In this chart, for example, the farmer, miller and the baker function as individual organs, each carrying out their mutually exclusive roles to transform grain flour and yeast into nourishment for the inhabitants of the state. In doing so each realizes their possibility of being by harmonizing with each other and contributing their specific talents to the state's continued existence. Significantly, Uexküll refers once more to the cinematograph to illustrate the proper functioning of individual individual organs within the body of the state. And the following he compares the two

dimensional space of representing the chain of individuals with that of the film screen. “If we draw our attention on a certain area of the diagram and pursue the lines of exchange among the different organs of the state, we may obtain a perspective like that provided by a cinematograph, which presents various durational images on the same surface. In the cinema image, figures emerge and pass by according to a determined law, on which the mechanics of the apparatus depends, and whose sprockets jerkily advance the film role, animating the still diagram. The cinema is particularly suited to representing biopolitical life in corresponding the unfolding of the moving image with the unfolding life of the state organism. Yet it is on this basis that Uexküll can identify the pathologies and parasites that invade the state, introducing more politically volatile correspondences to the allegorical vampire in Murnau’s *Nosferatu*. In the latter sections of *Biology of the state*, the zoologist singles out enemies of the state such as the Free Press Americanism, and the influx of foreign races, particularly those who originate from other nations and whose styles of being remain alien to Germany. “Genuine parasites that are dangerous to the state and are against its living participants may be called a foreign race. On the other hand, when they may be deemed useful to the state, one speaks not a parasitism, but of symbiosis.” Moreover, just as it is innate to its species that spiders entrap and consume flies, which we saw in the montage sequence from *Nosferatu*, so it is concomitant with nature’s plan that one nation, quote on quote, consume another.

### **11:02**

This was a postwar biopolitical situation that Uexküll wanted to explain in his text and which finds its resonance as a discursive potentiality and *Nosferatu*. Murnau’s film reminds us of the speed by which questions of politics contaminate the discourse of life, and the crises that arise as borders are continuously transgressed in our modern age. So that’s it. I’ll just leave it here for now, for the sake of time, but I’m happy to address other things in the q&a. Thanks so much.

### **11:38 – Erica Tortolani**

Wonderful, thank you so much, Steve. All right. So our next speaker is Lokke Heiss. Lokke has a medical degree and an MFA in film studies from USC. While in film school, Dr. Heiss was asked by film historian David Shepherd to help restore *Nosferatu* and provide a commentary track for the film. As part of Heiss’s research for this project. He traveled to Germany and Slovakia to find the original locations for the production, providing perhaps the first *Nosferatour* available for fans. Heiss has

contributed his research for the last 30 years, including two trips to Romania to find the origin of the word Nosferatu. Dr. Heiss writes about film on his website, Lokkeheiss.com, I can copy and paste the URL into the chat tool for anyone who's interested. So yeah, feel free to begin whenever you're ready Lokke.

### **12:37 – Lokke Heiss**

Thank you for that introduction. And I think I'll go right ahead and try to share my screen. And let's see if this works. Here we go and share. And did that work? Yeah, it did. Ok so Nosferatu, I'm going to talk about the name, the screenplay and the lost scenes. And I'll try and do that in less than 10 minutes. Obviously, I'll go quickly. What I'd really like to be doing today is to introduce these areas for the people watching or listening. So that they can go back on their own time and investigate. And that's if I can get that I'll be accomplished with my goal. So, the first part of this will be discuss the name Nosferatu itself. Where did it come from? And what is the most up to date discussion of this question? And for this, I have been researching this for decades. Last year, I was part of a congress that who was related to this, Dracula Congress, which had some Romanian, some Romanians in the Congress. And so we had a big get together, we went through a lot of different names. And what I'm going to talk about now is a result of that. So what most people are aware of, if they're probably attending this is that Murnau got the name Nosferatu from Bram Stoker's novel. And Bram Stoker got the name from Emily Gerard, who was born in Scotland, lived in Transylvania for two years, and wrote about it later. And we know that Stoker read Gerards work and he used a lot of what she wrote as a source for his book. So that's obviously where Galeen and Murnau got Nosferatu from. One thing people hear the name, and it's a very arresting name, so I think that a lot of people hear different words and they come along and they find one that that is interesting, and they can they remember it. But who came up with the word before Emily Gerard? And so my research has basically showed that

### **14:55**

that she did not make...she had a bad rap for a long time. She misheard a word, she didn't have any background in folklore and did not speak Romanian. It turns out though that she did not mishear the word. She merely copied it down. The word was around in Romania in the 1800s. We have a couple different locations where it was found, for example, another person Heinrich von Wlislöcki wrote about it, although he used Nosferat, not used the u, which in some ways, is a sign that the word was really there because he heard a version of it. But the person that was most important to this

was a man named Wilhelm Schmidt, a German school teacher at Hermannstadt, which later became Sibiu. And this is the town where Emily Gerard lived herself. And so all she had to do was to go down to the library and find the Austria Review magazine. She herself was doing research before her book. So ironically, she was doing what Bram Stoker would do later. And this is, the evidence for this is that the information in her book, the words and sentences match up very well to what Schmidt wrote about 20 years before she wrote her book. So William Schmidt was, was there first. And so then the question is, where did he hear it from and the best guess we have here, and this is from the people who speak Romanian. And after going through all the options, they thought that the word was most likely from the word Nefârtatu and the issue is, is that the F sound probably got some slippage there, from the F to the s, which is a very common thing to happen in people who are who are vocal, spoken language, and not writing things down. So that language changes quickly. This was a local word. Nefârtatu is not a word that's common in Romania today. And that's why I had to be with some Romanian scholars who are familiar with this to really get the best guess. Fârtat is 'brother,' Nefârtat is 'not my brother'. In other words, it's a name for the devil. And so that all matches up. And so, you know, of course, nobody's knows for sure. But this is this was a consensus of about, oh, five or six different Romanian scholars who actually are familiar with the whole idea of Nosferatu. So that's what I'm going with now until someone can come up with better evidence and make sense to me. So I'm going to move right over to Nosferatu, the lost scenes. And this is an important slide really the most important I guess we can make this link more easily accessible, but it is the slide if you don't need this, you just Google Murnau Nosferatu screenplay and maybe Lottie Eisner, and it should get there the same place. I recommend anybody reading this, watching this to read the shooting script. It's from Lottie Eisner's book on Murnau. And in the back of the book, she had this shooting script given to her by Murnau's family, and she had it translated into English, or in this edition it was translated in English. And so this is a way of seeing close to what was intended. This of course, was not the original screenplay, but the shooting script. So you see a lot of additions that Murnau put in as he took...added or took away. But I'm going to show you what, course we don't have time to go over the whole script, but I'm just going to identify a couple scenes. For example, this is the original scene and "Fade in townscape, Wisma"r. This is you know that location shooting. "View over the roofs of a small old fashioned town built in the style of the 1840s." And we get right into the scene about Hutter and Ellen. And right away those of us familiar with the film, come up with this very odd scene where she gives him, he gives her flowers and she's not happy about it. It's the intertitle is strange, you know, "why did you kill

them”? I saw one intertitle someone made the effort of saying Why did you destroy the flowers? So this is certainly an issue with translation. Why did you cut the flowers maybe?

### 19:40

Another way of looking at this, I joke with people that because this is such a Freudian story. That one of the answers of this question could be she could look at what he did and ask her why did you castrate the flowers? Since that seems to be what's going to be happening with him over the next part of the film. Anyway, you can look at the screenplay and get a better sense of what's going on there. And you see that a lot of the discussion of what was going on is left. Murnau either did not shoot it or edited it out as a trim. But very important to the scene is that this couple is poor. She doesn't have the money to do any real, to do shopping the way she wants. And then in the next scene, he tries to give her money from a purse and there's nothing there. So you have this very obvious motivation for the for the next scene where he's going to decide to go to Transylvania. So we don't have really the, the financial aspect of it at this point, we just have the odd rather strangely sexual content of the flowers, and then we move on. So we have to infer about the poverty in the in the scene coming up. And, and so that it I think it has the advantage in some ways of collapsing or truncating the plot to more like a dreamscape where, you know, when we have a dream, we don't always have motivations that are clear either, so we have to infer. So sometimes less is more. I want to show a copy of what the shooting script actually looked like. And this is of course in German. And the notes you see on top of that are Murnau's personal scribbled notes on this. I know the x that goes, you know, from doing films myself, this is carried on even today, when you x out a scene after you've done it, it was funny for me to look at it and see that it was going on even back then. This is the pages is the scene from when in the castle where Hutter looks out the window and sees the coffins being lined up. And I'm guessing that what we see on top of the page is some representation of the coffins perhaps going into the cart. And then it says End of Act II at the bottom there. It would be also if you really wanted to do it right you would get the original German texts which I believe are available and then you would have the ability to see what even closer to what Murnau was looking at when he when he shot the film, including one other scene that was copied that is in the in the book by Lottie Eisner, because it's the famous stairway scene. And you see that how Murnau constructed the scene visually, he drew out the stairway and then below that you see the camera setups and, and how he wanted to position the, the walk up to the ladder and so I always am very intrigued by how people can translate, you know, directors,



filmmakers translate something from word to image. And you can see Murnau's intent in doing that by looking at this picture. And finally, there are lost scenes. So for example, in the original screenplay, Nosferatu takes longer to die. He actually has an extra scene, and I'll read to you. "The bed is bathed in sunlight. He looks about in amazement for a moment he stands legs apart, as if trying to regain his balance. He touches at his heart and falls on his knees, his face turned to the sun." So from after this shot, then you had a shot a reaction shot of Ellen, realizing that she was successful, and then we should we go back to the scene that we do know, which is when he sort of walks away from the bed and then disappears. That seems intact. But this scene was eliminated. And

#### **24:15**

it's a very interesting comparison. Because when we look at any film made, let's say even in the 1960s with Hammer, there is no way you would not have the scene included in the film. If you think about the vampire's death. It's stretched out, you know, he has to have one reaction or two or three. And I think that that it shows you sort of different kind of styles of filmmaking. I think, though my own opinion is that some of this wasn't put in for more practical reasons and for aesthetic as this film was shot on a very little budget. And as someone who's tried to make films in film school, you get, you get the films you're trying to put it together in the workprint. And you realize it that you don't have the right coverage for what you want. And then you just lose scenes and I sense that that there was probably some of that going on here too, although for this particular shot who knows? Now you if you want to go on your own and read the screenplay, you'll see scenes like this throughout the film where you have more going on and then, what for me what's helpful for this is it gives you more of the motivation for the characters. You know, maybe you don't have to have them [*cuts out*] first time you see it because I think the first

#### **25:41**

[*cuts out*] fifth I think it's gonna be very interesting to see what happens when you when you read the film, and read the screenplay working print as you have the film in front of you in terms of your screen. And then you get to a part and you think, Oh, this this wasn't you know, this is extra. So these are sort of the lost scenes of Nosferatu at least as the as the concept was. I'm sure that in the original screenplay, there were far more scenes and as what happens almost always with these they get lost as the film gets tighter, but this was the very last thing to go in terms of scenes lost and you get motivations for Ellen and Hutter more, you have motivations for everything all the

other characters you see, you have more cross cutting that goes on in the scenes. This film is famous for a lot of cross cutting which is very ambitious for its for its time and there was even more cross cutting going on before, there was a scene in the Demeter where we actually see the ship and we have the rats going, you know, we have the coffins going back on the ship. So there's there's just like a whole another 10 or 20 minutes of the film that exist in our minds when we see the screenplay, but not in the actual film. So I think I've hit my 10 minutes and I'll be happy to. I'll be happy to get off- stop sharing the screen. And then I'll let I'll let someone else take over and...stop share. And thank you for that. And of course I'll be here for questions afterwards.

### **27:24 – Erica Tortolani**

Yes, thank you so much Lokke. Oh, right. Next up, we have Murray Leeder. Murray is an adjunct professor in the Department of English film theatre and Media at the University of Manitoba. He is the author of *Horror Film: A Critical Introduction, The modern supernatural and the beginnings of cinema and Halloween*. And he's also an editor of *Cinematic: ghost haunting and spectroscopy from silent cinema to the digital era*, and *Refocus: the films of William Castle*. So whenever you're ready, Murray, you can take over.

### **28:00-Murray Leeder**

Thank you very much, Erica. And I'll give my thanks for those who invited me here. It's been a great privilege, I'm just going to go ahead and share my screen now. Or share my PowerPoint here. I'm going to start by echoing some of what has been said already, in terms of like, first contact with Nosferatu always seemed so important. So for me, too, it came from books. I was a monster kid, you know, of the VHS era. And so my first contact definitely came from library books such as the Ian Thorne one that you see on the left here, from the one on the right, is from this book, actually, horror movies by Daniel Cohen, which was published sometime in the early 80s. And, and there are many others in which a set of stills you know, perhaps five or six tops would regularly be reprinted. And I'll draw your attention to the caption there, which alleges that it's claimed that Max Shreck was a pseudonym, that he was really Alford Able in disguise. Somebody should make a movie out of that. I don't know where that came from. And Nosferatu I recall a kind of moment in my childhood, maybe I was about 12. When I was thinking, you know, I could just get to go get a copy of this. So I found a VHS copy being sold at a video store. And I think that was the first VHS I ever bought with my own money. And again, I was probably 11 or 12 at that point. So I think that a lot of ways Nosferatu is responsible for, you know, my interest in film history, that it was a gateway drug so to speak. I don't want to use that term too

flippantly but I think it applies here. That it opened up all these all these possibilities about horror about silent cinema and about cinema in general that once I'd sat down with *Nosferatu* and taken in all of its amazing images, I just wanted to see more and more what else was there in film history. So I think it's no exaggeration to say that *Nosferatu* sent me on a path that led, well here, I suppose to speaking to you as a, as a film scholar. And kind of, it's always been a film that I love so much that I find it hard to write about. I'm always more comfortable writing about films that I liked a lot, than films I outright love. So when asked to write about *Nosferatu* for a forthcoming piece, I ended up, for forthcoming collection, I ended up more talking about the repurposing of the images of *Nosferatu* in later cinema. So that's what I want to briefly talk about today. And there are many more examples than I will get to here. In fact, the Internet Movie Database lists 230 movies in which footage from *Nosferatu* is featured. It's not just-that's television, as well as movies, of course. But even that seems like perhaps a bit of an understatement. And I think the fact that *Nosferatu* always existed, not always, but for a long time existed in this kind of copyright limbo, where hypothetically it was under copyright, but nobody was enforcing that copyright for most of the 20th century, so the footage gets repurposed all over the place. Now two of the most important earlier examples are *Boo* in 1932, and *The Vampire* by John Painlevé in 1945. And I sometimes when I teach *Nosferatu* I screen these side by side because they're very different in every respect other than that they both repurpose footage from *Nosferatu*. *Boo* is a is a comedy in which Universal is making fun of its own nascent horror franchise basically. And students are always interested in seeing it. It's a short that repurposes footage from *Frankenstein*, footage from *Nosferatu* and other films into this very silly kind of narrative. One of my students likened it to the honey badger video, where like the silly VoiceOver is making fun of all the images that we're seeing and so on. And people were surprised by how modern it is. Also that it makes contemporary jokes about the depression and about Congress and that sort of thing. Somehow the idea of political humor having existed in these other periods seems surprising.

### **32:43**

The vampire by Painlevé, of course is a different ball of wax. It's a science film ostensibly about the habits of the vampire bat, which is intercut with footage from *Nosferatu* but it also functions as an allegory for fascism. And famously, there's a bit in there where the, they've managed to photograph the vampire bat looking like it's giving a Heil Hitler salute with its with its wing. So those are the two important I think, early examples of the repurposing of *Nosferatu* exactly. Now, you see many examples,

and I won't linger on all of them, which are very different in character like in Roger Avery's film *Killing Zoe*. Footage from *Nosferatu* is a kind of film brat citation intercut with a sex scene to kind of tie together sex and, sex and death and of the kind of heritage of European art cinema. In *Fahrenheit 911*, the Roger Moore film, the presence of, of Romania in George W. Bush's *Coalition of the Willing* is represented by footage from *Nosferatu*. In *vamps*, which I always like to shine a spotlight on this film because I think it's-it's an interesting hidden gem. It uses a lot of, repurposes a lot of clips from films like *Nosferatu* and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and *Metropolis* as kind of ironic counterpoints on his own comic vampire narrative. And in particular, Count Orlok's mastery over rats is put into counterpoint with the two vampire characters played here by Alicia Silverstone and Krysten Ritter who work as exterminators that's like their day job or night job I suppose, technically, and who also feed off that feed off rats rather, including literally sticking straws into them to drink their blood. So there are many other examples in in horror films, *Scream 2* for example, throws footage from *Nosferatu* onto a TV screen at one point during a tense sequence, this kind of fannish citation. *Nosferatu*, I think, boosted in visibility in the 90s quite considerably. And then you also have the repurposing of the aesthetic, particular the visual aesthetic of, of Orlok's makeup so that you get it in in *Salem's Lot* of course, in Herzog's literal remake, and to a lesser extent in its bizarre sequel *Vampire in Venice* or *Nosferatu in Venice*. Certain vampire films pick it up later on like *Subspecies*, and it usually represents the more bestial aspects of a vampire. Like in *Subspecies*, for example, there, there are two main vampires, a good one and a bad one, so to speak. And they are contrasted in terms of their visual design and reduce the bad vampire gets aspects of the Orlok makeup design. You also get it in *Aliens*, and this is the subject of the forthcoming essay that I referred to before. So in an episode called *The Space Vampire* in *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*, space vampire is clearly influenced by the by the Orlok design with the pointed ears, bald, prominent brow and prominent eyebrows and the and the fangs, somewhat modified, but you can see the influence for sure. Other aliens, *Dark City* of course, is another example where aspects of the *Nosferatu* look have been repurposed. In this case, not in terms of...not for actual vampires, just for characters that are coded as vampiric in some way or another. And there's the Pa'uans in *Star Wars* they appear ...they appear briefly in in the return of the Sith I believe.

### 37:03

And in *Star Trek Nemesis*, possibly the worst *Star Trek* film, certainly the one that killed the film franchise for a while, it's more bestial Romulan offshoot called the Remans is

clearly and unapologetically styled after the Orlok look. In fact, I have an excerpt here from the screenplay by John Logan in which Nosferatu is overtly cited. There's a very citational quality to that screenplay where *Alien* and other films are like overtly mentioned in the screenplay as a reference point. And it should be said that in most cases, these are fairly unsympathetic characters that when the Nosferatu look is repurposed, it's for vampires that we're supposed to mostly hate...to think of his bestial and clearly, you know, unequivocally evil. So that's basically what I want to talk about here. I've spent more time writing about *Star Trek Nemesis* than I ever thought that I would. But as somebody who, as a kid was obsessed with both vampires and *Star Trek*, it was a perfect post hoc merger of my, of my research interests. So I guess I'll leave it there. Thanks very much, everyone.

**38:18- Erica Tortolani**

Wonderful, thanks so much, Murray. Okay, lastly, under certainly not leastly we have Milly Williamson. Millie Williamson is a senior lecturer of media communications and Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths University of London, and author of *The Lore of the vampire: gender fiction and fandom from Bram Stoker to Buffy*. So, whenever you're ready, Mellie you can take charge.

**38:45 - Milly Williamson**

Thank you, Erica. And thank you for inviting me to take part in this symposium. It's been really interesting. And just as an aside, before I start, I wanted to say to Lokke that I was discussing some of the ideas and what I'm going to present with my 20 year old daughter, who knows of Nosferatu from *Spongebob*, which I think somebody mentioned in the in the chat and asked me what you know, where does Nosferatu come from? And what does it mean, of course, I had to blag it because I had no idea. But now I can go back and be informed. So thank you very much.

**39:20**

Okay, so what I wanted to talk to you about today is I just really want to say a few words about women in relation to Nosferatu. And think about some of the gendered themes in the film. And I want to do that by way of comparison to those themes found in-in *Dracula*, the novel and and its adaptations. We know that Nosferatu was seen to be an adaptation of *Dracula*, close enough for content to infuriate Bram Stoker's widow, who sued for copyright infringement, yet different enough in its depiction of a vampire, not as a suave intellectual, but as utterly repellent, so that Florence Balcombe Stoker was seven years in litigation to try to wipe from the cinematic record

any association of the film *Nosferatu* with the novel. I want to think about the gendered themes in the film, as I say by contrasting them to those more associated with *Dracula*, the seducer. And actually some of the themes are similar, although Murnau's film handles them quite differently. In both, women are symbolic of the threat the vampire represents. And as such, both roles draw on the symbolic power of the virtuous woman and the question of betrayal. But Count Orlok is not depicted as a seductive foreign invader. Actually, most of the film is about the vampire space being invaded by the Harker character we know was renamed Hutter. And the count is kind of palpable, is quiet at this intruder in his environment. Instead, we can think of Orlok representing, as Steve said in his book, plague and pestilence. And when he finally arrives in civilization, which is about two thirds of the way through the film, he's accompanied by a plague of rats, Orlok's appearance and his association with plague and disease, led a number of commentators again, as Steve pointed out, to express unease at the way that the film parallels the widespread and growing anti-semitic tropes of the early 20th century. And of course, this view of the film seems to be given further weight by the fact, by the way that the vampire communicates—he uses a mysterious code that includes actually some Hebrew letters and the Star of David. And, of course, Nazi propaganda in Germany at the time, but also the *Daily Mail* in the UK, our lovely *Daily Mail* overtly likened Eastern European Jews to plagues of rats. The film may be drawing on this imagery. And of course, this might then shape our understanding of the threat that the vampire represents, and also this kind of symbolic significance of the woman as his victim. In the case of *Dracula*, this is a threat of invasion. And the fear it animates is tied to a Victorian version of woman as virtuous and pure and in need of protection, and thus the threat is gendered. It is figured as the threat of sexual desire being awakened in an honorable and/or Virgin femininity. Orlok's threat in contrast, is one of disease and contagion. In fact, in the domestic space, although of course, it is also about the body politic. But unlike *Dracula*, Orlok doesn't try to seduce Hutter's wife. And indeed, he seems utterly incapable of human discourse and interaction. Instead, he sneaks into a room and bites her. And this is exactly what he did, you know, that was the way he previously attacked Hunter in his castle. So it's interesting that in *Dracula*, it's the symbols of patriarchy, in the shape of the crew of light, who dispatch *Dracula*...that Jonathan beheads him while Quincy stabs him repeatedly. And the dispatch, therefore, is a very male affair with the woman as a symbol of the nation in need of protection. But *Nosferatu* seems to imply that plagues are made by men. The film was made again, as Steve pointed out, not long after the Spanish flu pandemic, itself a likely product of the wreckage wrought by the First World War. But in *Nosferatu* it is a woman, Hutter's wife Ellen, who dispatches the

threat of disease. And in this case, it's not the violence of weapons wielded by man, but the cleansing power of sunlight and the trickery of women. In the scene where Orlok dies he actually appears as if he's starving and is so distracted by feeding on Ellen's blood, that he doesn't realize the dawn has broken. And like other diseases he's killed by the light. Orlok is very much ensnared by Ellen who herself is a symbol of the realm of the domestic, but not in a placid or non-agentic way. And in fact, when we first see Ellen, when she first appears on screen, is holding her cat, and like the feline, she's a domestic hunter who catches the rat-like Vampire who's invaded her home and also actually her body. In Warner Herzog's 1979 remake of *Nosferatu* this introduces romantic themes found in contemporary *Dracula* adaptations- he's a much more vulnerable figure than those *Draculas* and he's also trapped and killed by a woman. This time though, she is depicted as the woman he loved. She picks him when he's feeding on her and this is in the '79 film hit and he pulls back kind of sated. She pulls him towards her again to feed more, which he takes as a sign of love returned. But actually, it's a con and a betrayal because she knows that the sun is breaking and its power will finish him off. So these women dispatch the threat represented by the power, power not afforded to women in the *Dracula* tale. Although the power is not unproblematic, though, but for in the original film, Ellen's agency is clearly located in the domestic sphere, and may also really be read through the film's anti semitic themes. In the later 1979 film, the female agency is situated in notions of feminine betrayal. But nonetheless, these are symbolic, you know, they are-the women of a symbolic center of the final action rather than the male characters. And of course, it's another woman Florence Balcombe Stoker who tries to kill *Nosferatu* off completely in cinematic culture, although she was far less successful than her cinematic distance.

#### **46:00 – Erica Tortolani**

All right, thank you so much, Millie. Yes. Um, do we have time for questions? Gary? Do we have time for questions? We have time? Yeah, we have time for about five minutes of questions. Yeah, we're running quite a bit late. But okay. Yes, yes, whoever has questions, feel free to direct message me.

#### **46:27-Lokke Heiss**

While we're waiting for that, I've heard Thomas Elsaesser, who's a great film critic talks about *Nosferatu*, the visual image of him as the conjoined collection of paradoxical others. And I can't think of a better way to describe that situation, because he has the anti-semitic but he has also the aristocracy he's got whatever it is that other, it's

somehow found in his being and at least in the image. So I like I like that a conjoined collection of paradoxical others. Not mine. I read it.

**47:06-Erica Tortolani**

See, okay, this is a question from Penny Goodman for Murray, has the extensive use of quotations from Nosferatu in other films helped to create a reputation for it as the or Ur-horror film? So you are for them?

**47:24-Murray Leeder**

Yes, I think the answer to that is definitely yes. And it routinely appears on lists of best horror films, it's probably the only film of the silent era that that routinely appears on such lists, in fact. But what I find especially interesting about Nosferatu is that its status is art cinema sort of clings to it, even though it's been very much claimed by popular culture. And I don't think I can quite articulate that dynamic entirely, you know, but I think that's very much the case that Nosferatu gets evoked as a kind of arty vampire film, much in contrast with the universal and hammer traditions, which have different resonances of different sorts, obviously. But so I think the the answer is definitely yes though. After all, many more people are aware of Nosferatu from citations of it, including SpongeBob, I'm told that are unlikely to ever see it at this point, you know, that it, it is sort of present in the ether. So I think I think that is an important thing to note that, you know, it's but it's public profile has been hugely reshaped by its extensive portability, for sure. Yeah.

**48:42-Erica Tortolani**

Thank you. We have a question from quick from Chris. For Milly. Is Nosferatu also a kind of weird love story between Ellen and Nosferatu?

**48:58-Milly Williamson**

I'm unmuted I think that those themes are brought out. And Am I unmuted? Yeah, I think those themes are brought out and more fully in the 1979 film. But I wonder if they really are they're in the original 1922 Nosferatu because of the kind of vigor that Count Orlok is and his kind of his incapability of kind of human connection. So yeah, I think probably not so much.

**49:31-Erica Tortolani**

Yeah, thank you. We have I think this may be just the final question um for this panel. It's for everyone from Steven Bissette. So he says curious to me that only Nosferatu



links vampirism with rodents. It's not even stressed in the makeup designs of subsequent adoptions of Shreck makeup design for later screen characters. So I guess thoughts on that remark.

**49:57-Lokke Heiss**

I mean, there's two obvious answers. As the past the plague rats from that, and then that puts him to the pandemic, you have all that connection. And then also, at that point the play was going big guns, which the play would have had a different take on this. And so I, I think, the play eventually it became the very seductive, handsome vampire. But at this point that wasn't codified any way. And I think he-he clearly wanted to connect this to contagion. And so you're going to make rats as part of that rather than canines, because canines have a sort of a little more, you know, we have canines, I mean, so we have a connection to that, it's more human, more human than, than a rat, a rodent, like face.

**50:50-Steve Choe**

But I also add that there's another kind of anti semitic resonance here of rats being associated with cities and this sense in which cities are these un-hygienic places, you know, something like this, again, you know, the Elsaesser quote, I think is really helpful here and conglomerating all these, you know, images and xenophobic and otherwise.

**51:19-Erica Tortolani**

Awesome. Well, I think yeah, I think will elicit a Milly-did you have something to say? Should we go to break? Kris or Gary, or should we wrap up the fantastic panel? Just might I add really, really interesting stuff. Yeah. So yeah. How do we want to approach this?

**51:39-Kristopher Woofter**

Sure. Let's go. Let's have...let's give people a break. It's been a while and we're running quite a bit over time. Let's give until 3:40 return at 3:40 gives the people a chance to use the restroom and whatever else they have to do. And then we'll try to keep, panel three is three speakers. We'll keep that on on track. And yeah, see you at 3:40. Awesome.

**52:00**

Thank you, everyone.

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