

Scream, Blacula, Scream

“The intelligence of man is pathetically inadequate when pitted against the forces of the unknown.”—Blacula

1973, MGM

Director: Bob Kelljan

Screenplay: Joan Torres, Raymond Koenig, and Maurice Jules

Cinematography: Isidore Mankofsky

Editing: Fabien Tordjmann

Cast:

Blacula William Marshall

Justin Don Mitchell

Lisa Pam Grier

Sheriff Dunlop Michael Conrad

Willis Richard Lawson

Denny Lynn Moody

Gloria Janee Michelle

Elaine Barbara Rhoades

Ragman Bernie Hamilton

Plot summary:

Willis, who is the son of the dead voodoo priestess, wants to take over as leader of the cult. The cult tells Willis that his mother did not name a successor before she died. Therefore, the cult will vote on who the new priest or priestess will be. Willis is upset by this and claims that he should be the new priest because of his birthright. The cult disagrees and Willis threatens revenge. Willis meets up with a former voodoo priest and asks him to help him overthrow the cult. The former voodoo priest gives Willis a bag of bones with instructions on what to do with it. Willis takes the bag of bones home and follows the instructions. Blacula comes out of the bones and attacks Willis. Willis then becomes a vampire and Blacula rules over him. Eventually Willis' friends come looking for him and Blacula turns them into vampires also. Then Blacula meets Lisa. She is the adopted daughter of the dead voodoo priestess. Lisa has the most power in the voodoo cult. Blacula asks Lisa to exorcise the vampire out of him so that he can return to being the African prince that he was. Lisa agrees to perform an exorcism on Blacula. During the exorcism Justin, who is Lisa's boyfriend, breaks up the exorcism. Blacula is upset because he could feel the exorcism working and badly wanted the vampire out of his body. Blacula tries to attack Justin but Lisa stabs a wooden arrow into the heart of the voodoo doll of Blacula. This affects the real Blacula and he screams out in agony.

Connections to Stoker's Dracula:

Blacula was an African prince before he was Blacula. Dracula puts a curse onto the African prince. He tells the prince that he curses him to a living hell. He also tells the prince that he will crave human blood. Then he tells the prince that he curses him with his name. From now on he will be known as Blacula, vampire. The only other mention of Dracula was during a conversation Justin had with Blacula. Justin asks Blacula if he

had ever heard of Count Dracula. Justin tells Blacula he read of Count Dracula in a book, which tried to convince him there really were vampires. These are the only connections to Stoker's Dracula.

Thematic Analysis:

There are several thematic differences in Stoker's novel and Kelljan's movie. The novel focuses on multiple narrators, community, Christianity, and male heroes. The movie focuses on third person objective narrative, individualism, Voodoo, and a female hero. The novel's themes are more realistic, believable, and acceptable which make the novel better than the movie.

In Stoker's novel, multiple narrators were used. The use of multiple narrators created a sense of realism. The characters narrate via their journals. This gives the reader a sense of omniscience because the reader knows what all of the characters are thinking. Only the sane characters get to narrate. The insane characters, such as Renfield, and the superstitious characters, such as the innkeeper, never get to narrate. By only having the sane characters narrate, there is a sense of trust. The reader wants to believe what the characters are saying because they are sane, rational people.

In Kelljan's movie, third person objective narrative was used. This use of narrative seems less realistic. There isn't a sense of believability in the characters because the viewer cannot get inside their heads as in Stoker's novel. The movie used flashback in the beginning to tell how Blacula became a vampire. By working together, the characters in the novel slowly discovered that Dracula was a vampire. There wasn't a sense of mystery in the movie. The viewer knew exactly what they were dealing with.

Community played a major role in the novel because the characters worked together. The characters created a committee in order to defeat Dracula. They pooled their knowledge together by using their journal entries. The community believed in vampires and worked together to defeat Dracula.

Community wasn't a part of what helped to defeat Blacula. Justin gathered the information against vampires and tried to get the police to help him. The police didn't believe in vampires but wanted to help rescue Lisa from Blacula. Essentially Justin was alone in the rescue because the police didn't believe in the vampires. The movie is focused more on individualism than community.

Another difference in the themes of the novel and movie is the role that religion played. In the novel Christianity played a part in defeating Dracula. Crucifixes were used to keep Dracula from harming an individual. Also the holy circle was used to either keep a vampire in or out of the circle. The vampire could not cross the line of the circle. Voodoo was used in the movie to defeat Blacula. Blacula wanted to be redeemed by having the vampire exorcised out of him through the use of voodoo. Instead voodoo killed Blacula by Lisa stabbing a wooden arrow into the heart of the voodoo doll of Blacula.

Voodoo is seen as a cult in the eyes of Christians. Voodoo has many negative connotations such as evil, Satan, and the drinking of blood. Thematically changing the religion makes a big statement. Traditionally, Christianity versus vampires is seen as good versus evil but Voodoo versus vampires is seen as evil versus evil. Humans desire or even need good to triumph. Evil defeating Blacula makes the movie less plausible or acceptable.

Another reason the movie isn't as acceptable as the novel is because Lisa killed Blacula. Lisa has the most power and uses it to defeat Blacula, while her boyfriend is powerless under Blacula's control. In our society, men are usually the strong ones. Traditionally men are the heroes and women are powerless. In the novel Jonathan and Quincy Morris kill Dracula while Mina watches. This scenario is more acceptable in our society because men need to feel like they are in control.

The thematic differences between the novel and the movie play a major part in reader/viewer enjoyment. The movie's storyline just isn't as believable or acceptable as the novel's. If a person wants to be entertained, they are better off reading Dracula than watching Scream, Blacula, Scream.