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### Revamping Dracula on the Mexican Silver in Fernando Méndez's El vampiro

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# VAMPIRES AND ZOMBIES

**TRANSCULTURAL MIGRATIONS AND  
TRANSNATIONAL INTERPRETATIONS**

Edited by

Dorothea Fischer-Hornung and Monika Mueller

UNIVERSITY PRESS OF MISSISSIPPI † JACKSON

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## PART 3

# CULTURAL ANXIETIES





## REVAMPING DRACULA ON THE MEXICAN SILVER SCREEN

*Fernando Méndez's El vampiro*

CARMEN SERRANO

Cinematic representations of the monstrous and the supernatural are an inextricable part of film history, and the vampire is among its international stars. *The Devil's Manor* (1896), by French film pioneer Georges Méliès, is considered one of the first films to play with the vampire theme. In it, a bat-like creature flies into a Gothic castle and then is transformed into a sinister cloaked figure (see Abbott 2004, 12). In 1922 director F. W. Murnau made the critically acclaimed German expressionist film *Nosferatu*, which presents one of the most frightening versions of the aristocratic vampire as described in Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* (1897). Since then, the vampire figure has found numerous embodiments throughout the world and in various media.

Like the vampire, the filmic image is reborn, parodied, abused, and killed, only to resurrect again. Typically, the fear-instilling vampire films appear to satisfy popular taste for a while, but interest quickly subsides, resulting in parodies such as *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (Charles Barton, 1948) and *The Fearless Vampire Killers; or, Pardon Me, but Your Teeth Are in My Neck* (Roman Polanski, 1967). Nevertheless, there is always a new group of spectators ready to consume the latest articulation of the vampire. This is exemplified in the recent *Twilight* saga film series (2008–2012) based on Stephenie Meyer's series of novels with the same titles, which were extraordinarily successful, especially among teenage girls. The popularity of these films along with the revenues generated inevitably led to the production of more vampire films, which include, to name just a few, *Daybreakers* (Michael Spierig and Peter Spierig, 2009), *Dark Shadows* (Tim Burton, 2012), *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* (Timur Bekmambetov, 2012), and *Let Me In*

(Matt Reeves, 2010), which is the American remake of the Swedish film *Let the Right One In* (Tomas Alfredson, 2008).

Prior to the latest renaissance of bloodsucking creatures on the big screen, the appeal of the supernatural and the monstrous had been thoroughly exploited by US film studios, which produced the first American horror film series between 1931 and 1939. Among the most famous terror-inducing film series of this era are *Dracula* (Tod Browning, 1931), *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931), *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1931), and *White Zombie* (Victor Halperin, 1932). *Dracula*, starring Bela Lugosi, was a sensational success, selling over 50,000 tickets in just two days (see Phillips 2005, 13). In the end, the film grossed more than twenty-five million dollars, which is all the more remarkable given that the country was in the midst of the Great Depression (see Flynn 1992, 39).

These films were not only popular among US audiences: they were also successful internationally, especially in Latin America. With the advent of sound in 1927 and because the Hollywood studios wanted to maintain their stronghold in Spanish-speaking countries, more than one hundred Spanish-language films were made by Hollywood studios from 1930 through 1935 (see Pinto 1973, 474). The most famous of these Spanish-language film versions was *Drácula* (1931), by the US film director George Melford. The film used Spanish-speaking actors and was shot at night using the same sets, script, and shot list as Tod Browning's English *Dracula*.

Even though both films were produced simultaneously, the Spanish film version of *Dracula* was finished several weeks before its English counterpart and was screened in Los Angeles in January 1931. In April of that same year, the Spanish-language version of the film premiered in Mexico City, where it played throughout the month (see Skal 1990, 41). According to John Flynn (1992), the Spanish *Dracula* continued to play for many years in various Spanish-speaking countries, an indication of the popularity of these films in Latin America. Following the success of the Spanish version of *Dracula* and other Hollywood horror films in the 1930s and 1940s, Mexico experienced its own national vampire film boom, which began in the 1950s and lasted well over a decade. Some of the Mexican films include *El vampiro* (Fernando Méndez, 1957) (*The Vampire*); *El ataúd del vampiro* (Fernando Méndez, 1958) (*The Vampire's Coffin*); *El mundo de los vampiros* (Alfonso Corona Blake, 1960) (*The World of the Vampires*); *El Santo contra las mujeres vampiro* (Alfonso Corona Blake, 1962) (*El Santo against the Female Vampires*); and *Las vampiras* (Federico Curiel, 1969) (*The Female Vampires*). As in the United States, the initial films were first-class productions that were aesthetically complicated and fear-provoking, whereas the later films could only

be described as low-quality parodies. For example, in *El Santo contra las mujeres vampiro*—a real camp classic—“El Santo” (a professional wrestler who appeared frequently on television) overtakes and defeats the demonic, albeit gorguous, vampire vixens who plot to bring about the apocalypse by unleashing vampire monsters on earth.

The vampire figure in the Mexican context might at first seem like an unlikely appropriation of a foreign cultural symbol, yet there is a complicated and meaningful relationship between the vampire monster and the vampire bat that draws on Mexican culture being negotiated in these films. The Mexican vampire films illustrate how the vampire monster travels from place to place and is seemingly transformed in each context, thereby revealing the circumstances in which it is produced. Because the vampire figure has appeared in literature and film in various countries, it is worth exploring how the vampire is recast in different national contexts. This underscores the ways in which the vampire monsters destabilize specific constructions of belonging and, most important, how these vampire films express anxieties concerning national boundaries and citizenship at specific social and political crossroads. Here, I analyze the ways in which the articulation of the vampire in Mexico differs from the typical form of the vampire produced in films in Europe and the United States. At the same time, I discuss how the vampire embodies Mexican fears having to do with foreign outsiders; specifically, the immigrant and the colonizer.

The vampire is a mythical being that was already part of the pre-Columbian Mexican imaginary, which influenced European vampire folklore and subsequent vampire literature and film. The chronicles relating to the conquest of America in the fifteenth century introduced the first vampire bats—a species capable of killing cattle and even humans—to the European imaginary. This bloodsucking bat of the Americas was very different from the innocuous European fructivore, which had no metaphoric association with the figure of the vampire monster. Before the identification of the Latin American bloodsucking bat species by explorers and travelers, the vampire monster was usually described as a zombie-like dunce and was associated with other animals. The vampire monster was thought to be able to transform itself into a cat, dog, wolf, rat, or other creature, but the vampire was not necessarily associated with the bat. However, upon European sighting and reporting, the vampire bat species was subsequently incorporated to the vampire folklore in Europe (see McNally and Florescu 1994, 125–26). In his Gothic novel *Dracula* (1897), Bram Stoker amalgamates the American bat species and the vampire monster. In effect, he creates the quintessential vampire that not only spawns the filmic model, but also establishes the modern

image of the vampire still current in popular culture. The French biologist Comte de Buffon used the term *vampire* in the mid-eighteenth century to describe the bloodsucking bat species of South America; however, it was Charles Darwin who further disseminated the existence of the bloodsucking bat species when he described it after his famous *Voyage of the Beagle* (1839). In his discussion of the vampire bat he notes the following:

*The Vampire bat is often the cause of much trouble, by biting the horses on their withers. The injury is generally not so much owing to the loss of blood as to the inflammation, which the pressure of the saddle afterwards produces. The whole circumstance has lately been doubted in England; I was therefore fortunate in being present when one (Desmodus dorbignyi, Bat.) was actually caught on a horse's back. We were bivouacking late one evening near Coquimbo, in Chile, when my servant, noticing that one of the horses was very restive, went to see what was the matter, and fancying he could distinguish something suddenly put his hand on the beast's withers, and secured the vampire. In the morning the spot where the bite had been inflicted was easily distinguished from being slightly swollen and bloody. The third day afterward we rode the horse, without any ill effect. ([1839] 1909, 32–33)*

Travelers who ventured throughout the Americas from the fifteenth century through the twentieth century often wrote about their experiences with these bats, fueling the imagination of those who received their letters. The consequential incorporation of the bat into European vampire folklore is not so difficult to imagine. Even as late as 1922, travelers were still amazed by this creature. William Beebe describes his experiences with the vampire bat in *Edge of the Jungle*:

*For three nights they swept about us with hardly a whisper of wings, and accepted either toe, or elbow, or finger, or all three, and the coats and floor in the morning looked like an emergency hospital behind an active front. In spite of every attempt at keeping awake, we dropped off to sleep before the bats had begun, and did not waken until they left. We ascertained, however, that there was no truth in the belief that they hovered or kept fanning with their wings. Instead they settled on the person with an appreciable flop and then crawled to the desired spot. (18)*

The chronicles of the conquest and the subsequent travel letters only helped fuse the association of the bat with the vampire monster that began to

appear in literature. One of the first literary works to have associated the bat with the vampire monster is the serially published English Gothic novel *Varney the Vampire* (1845) by Thomas Peckett Press and James Malcolm Rymer. However, it is Stoker who crystallizes the image of the vampire as we generally know it today: the vampire is an aristocratic, refined man, with the supernatural ability to hypnotize his victims, read minds, and transform himself into an animal. At the same time, he is almost always an ambitious being seeking to infect and conquer new lands. In *Dracula*, Stoker makes various allusions to the beasts from South America:

*I have not seen anything pulled down so quick since I was on the Pampas and had a mare that I was fond of go to grass all in a night. One of those big bats that they call vampires had got at her in the night, and what with his gorge and the vein left open, there wasn't enough blood in her to let her stand up, and I had to put a bullet through her as she lay. ([1897] 1996, 150–51)*

This description of the vampire bat in the Americas clearly altered European vampire folklore; however, when the monster was reappropriated and used in Latin American texts and films in the twentieth century, it seemed to lose its original autochthonous pre-Columbian association.

Bats in Latin American autochthonous cultures were not usually associated with evil; instead, they were perceived as powerful creatures, mediums, and sometimes gods. For example, in the Tajin pre-Columbian stone sculptures of Veracruz, vampire bats are depicted as gods that are important in postsacrificial ceremonies (see Kampen 1978, 117). At the same time, the powerful bats also appear in the *Popul Vuh*—the book of creation and epic myths of the Quiche Maya, which was transcribed from oral tradition to written text by the Dominican monk Francisco Ximenez in the seventeenth century. In it a “death bat,” or *caroozotz*, takes the head of one of the twin heroes, which is then carried to the ritual ball game. According to J. Eric S. Thompson, in several of the codices (for example, those of Borgia, Porfirio Diaz, or Codex Fejérváry-Mayer), anthropomorphized bats are depicted as involved in human sacrifice (see Thompson 1966, 180–81). The Zotzil Maya, who live on the plateau of Chiapas, used to call themselves *Zotzil uinic* or bat men, claiming that their ancestors had found a stone bat that they took as their god (see Thompson 1966, 176). In other words, the first bat men could be found in the Americas.

The pre-Columbian bat's association with the sacred is erased when the American bat species reaches the opposite shore of the Atlantic. There, the



bat becomes a fear-instilling and malignant being, these being among the usual qualities associated with the contemporary vampire. In an ironic twist of fate, the vampire bat, the autochthonous bloodsucking creature from the Americas that informed Stoker's own creation of the vampire monster in *Dracula*, returns home in the twentieth century transformed and repackaged in print and celluloid form in which the vestiges of his previous incarnation have seemingly been buried.

Before the conquest, the vampire bat belonged to the sacred or the mythic underworld; however, after the conquest the vampire bat became almost solely associated with the profane. More specifically, the vampire bat returned to the Americas as its evil double, recalling many doubles from literature and film. For example, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are one and the same individual, but divided between the man of reason and the uncontrollable monster. Dr. Frankenstein is in incessant conflict with his other, the very monster he has created. Once he has given life to the aberrant being, his singular mission is to destroy it, but never realizes this goal. Yet another example can be found in Dorian Gray: he is the eternally young, refined gentleman, while the painting, his other, is his aging and decrepit evil half. These men, who perhaps had good intentions, are haunted and persecuted by their other, and one of them will usually perish. In the case of Mexico, it is the monstrous other, the European vampire, that annihilates the memory of the autochthonous bat deity that once was.

## RELOCATION OF ANXIETIES: DISEASE, XENOPHOBIA, AND THE FOREIGN

Critics often interpret the vampire monster as a subversive intruder that infects and reproduces itself, threatening national borders. According to David Punter, the invasion of the other expresses fear having to do with perceived racial degeneration, which corrupts notions of identity (see Punter and Byron 2004, 232). The vampire is usually understood as the other that threatens to transgress borders or boundaries from the outside. In her book *Skin Shows*, Judith Halberstam argues that the vampire condenses many different kinds of threats into one body:

*For Dracula is the deviant or the criminal, the other against whom the normal and the lawful, the marriageable and the heterosexual can be known and quantified. . . . [H]e is the boundary, he is the one who crosses. . . . [H]e threatens stability. . . . He is a composite of otherness*

*that manifests as the horror essential to dark, foreign, and perverse bodies. (1995, 89–90)*

In other words, part of what constitutes this body's peculiarity is its ethnicity (see Halberstam 1995, 91). Halberstam argues that *Dracula* resembles the Jew portrayed in British anti-Semitic discourse in the late nineteenth century:

*In Dracula vampires are precisely a race and a family that weakens the stock of Englishness by passing on degeneracy and the disease of blood lust. Dracula, as a monster/master parasite, feeds upon the English wealth and health. He sucks blood and drains resources, he always eats out. (1995, 95)*

The othering that Halberstam here identifies in the novel has been observed in vampire films as well. In Murau's *Nosferatu*, the repulsive rodent-like Count Orlock (associated with the bubonic plague) invades a small German town. Critics, including Ken Gelder in *Reading the Vampire* (1994), have argued that it is difficult not to interpret this film as anti-Semitic because the image of Count Orlock so closely resembles the images of Jews depicted in pre-Nazi propaganda. The vampire embodies a coded expression of cultural fears that requires unpacking. William Hughes suggests the following:

*For criticism, though, the vampire frequently remains a "menace" even when its threat is not regarded as implicated sexuality. Indeed, there appears to be a critical imperative that dissociates the vampire from conventional humanity, polarising the un-dead in a cultural Ollier whose practices constitute an intervention into the integrity of race and nation or an invasion to the sanctity of home and family. (2012, 201)*

This visual projection of the deviant, aberrant other reemerges in the 1931 US film production of *Dracula* starring Bela Lugosi. If the vampire encodes anxieties about a foreign other, who can we read as this other? In his discussion of *Dracula*, Kendall Phillips suggests that the film's monster was the perfect embodiment of chaos brought on by extreme economic turmoil. With xenophobia becoming more pronounced due to increased immigration, those arriving from war-devastated Europe were especially vulnerable to aggression directed at immigrants (see Phillips 2005, 16). At the same time, within the social-political context in which these films were produced, there were also very specific foreign, dark bodies threatening notions of national identity. Like the immigrants arriving from Europe, Mexicans arriving in the

United States were vulnerable to hostility. According to the historian Manuel Gonzales, after the financial collapse that led to the Great Depression there was an increase in racial tensions in which ethnically marked Americans—especially those from Mexico—were suspect. Mexicans in the United States were often depicted in the media as diseased, as sexually deviant, and as nocturnal criminals. Mexicans, like other ethnic Americans—and like vampires—were perceived as a seeming threat to the integrity of race and nation. These damning descriptions of an entire culture and its people that were not uncommon at the time, coupled with the desire to be rid of the “Mexican Problem,” led to the repatriation of approximately 400,000 Mexicans between 1929 and 1937 (see Gonzales 1999, 148). This was an exclusionary process in which certain citizens could never really assert their rights in spite of having US passports; this was further reinforced by the fact that some of those deported were US citizens of Mexican heritage. Thus, it seems likely that the cultural anxieties embodied in the vampire figure as described by Phillips were focused not only on immigrants arriving from Southern and Eastern Europe, but also those coming from Mexico.

The first major Hollywood horror films were produced between 1931 and 1939, which coincides with the repatriations of Mexicans between 1929–1937; therefore, it is worth exploring the many ways in which horror films articulated fears having to do with Mexican immigration specifically. Juan Bruce-Novoa has read American science-fiction films from mid-century as reflecting fears of alien encroachment. He says the following:

*Of course, alien visitation films share a fear of the unearthly, nonhuman origins of the migrant. Both alien considered here begin as undesirables: more than merely the unknown, they present a potential threat materialized in the violation of earthly boundaries presumed inviolable. (2011, 17)*

## EL VAMPIRO—WHAT DOES SPEAKING SPANISH MEAN?

If the vampire can be interpreted as resulting from a gesture of othering, what happens when Mexico has its own vampire film boom? Is there an other? If so, who is this other? In the case of the film *El vampiro*, it is a white, foreign, aristocratic, and perverse body that threatens Mexican identity. Given the violent past of conquest and colonization, Spain would seem like the most likely candidate for representation by an invading body. Or, if not Spain, perhaps this film articulates fears of a US invasion through the

vampire figure. Mexico has had a contentious relationship with the United States that is akin to the vampire relationship: one of seduction and consumption. However, as I describe later in more detail, it is vis-à-vis France and French culture that the film *El vampiro* seems—perhaps somewhat surprisingly—to reaffirm Mexican identity.

The Mexican critic Carlos Monsiváis describes how emerging Mexican film companies “nationalized” the Hollywood model to create a successful homegrown industry. He also argues that the Mexican film studios not only created films that would please popular taste by following a formula that had proven to be financially lucrative, but they also promoted cultural nationalism through the exaltation of edifying symbols: historical events, local humor, national celebrations, local traditions, and religion (see Monsiváis 2003, 265). These signifiers of Mexican identity, or *mexicanidad*, are played out in very specific ways in *El vampiro* in which the villainous other and the heroes can best be understood within national conceptions of belonging.

*El vampiro*, the 1957 Mexican horror classic, is one of the most esteemed films in its genre and was considered one of Mexico's most successful films in that year. The film was not only a box-office hit in Mexico, but also became a cult classic internationally. These films were eventually dubbed in English and were shown on television in the United States in the 1960s (see Shaw and Dennison 2005, 227–28). The tremendous success of *El vampiro* resulted in the immediate production of its sequel, *El ataúd del vampiro* (*The Vampire's Coffin*).

The plot of *El vampiro* follows a predictable vampire-film model. Here, two innocent victims, Marta and Enrique, arrive on the dangerous terrain of the Count in Sicomoros, Mexico. Instead of Count Dracula, we find the equally ominous and sinister Count Lavud, also known as Mr. Duval. Mr. Duval has a plan to illicitly acquire Marta's family hacienda by slowly turning the family members into vampires. Marta's aunt Eloisa has already been turned into a vampire, while her other aunt, María Teresa, has been buried alive in the family crypt. Ultimately, Enrique and María Teresa will have to cast out the vampire in order to save the family estate and restore order.

The film has all the usual characteristics of the classic vampire film as first established by Murnau's *Nosferatu*, but transferred to rural Mexico in the mid-twentieth century. Rather than in a Gothic castle, the story takes place in a once-magnificent hacienda, whose surrounding land is haunted by vampires. This hacienda has the customary architecture associated with the Gothic castle, including trapdoors, secret passageways, a crypt, libraries, and subterranean labyrinths. Furthermore, instead of the superstitious

Transylvanians often found in various vampire films, Mexican Catholic mestizo peasants adorn the screen. The opening scene shows a vampire attacking a young aristocratic woman in a grand Mexican hacienda sometime in the mid-1800s, but then cuts to a scene in rural Mexico in the 1940s, where all of the subsequent action unfolds.

Typically, the heroine first arrives at the site where she will inevitably be seduced and bitten by the aristocratic vampire. As in the opening scenes in the films *Nosferatu* and the Browning *Dracula*, a mysterious carriage arrives with an equally mysterious shifty-eyed henchman in order to transport the unwitting victim and hero, Marta and Enrique, to the vampire's terrain. The carriage driver in this film is not only transporting Marta and Enrique, but he is also transporting soil brought from Bakonia, Hungary, in a crate addressed to Mr. Duval, the villain.

As I have described earlier, the vampire in the film *El vampiro* has lost its associations with the pre-Columbian deity, the death bat, or the sacred medium. This Mexican filmic vampire inherits many of the characteristics of the vampire conceived by Bram Stoker and represented in the films *Nosferatu* and *Dracula* (both the English and Spanish versions): an aristocratic, refined, and erotic evil soul seeking to devour victims and conquer lands.

The villain is the elegant and distinguished Mr. Duval, who is dressed in foreign-looking noble garb with a large pendant, all of which is reminiscent of Bela Lugosi's *Dracula* costume. At the same time, there is one additional feature present in this vampire that was not part of the visual representation in vampire films up to this point (see Cotter 2006, audio commentary): he has canine-like fangs. Stoker's vampire does have this feature; however, in films up to 1957, the sharp teeth were not usually visually represented. Stoker describes the Count in the following way:

*His face was a strong—a very strong—aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils; with lofty domed forehead, and hair growing scantily round the temples, but profusely elsewhere. His eyebrows were very massive, almost meeting over the nose, and with bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion. The mouth, so far as I could see it under the heavy moustache, was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth; these protruded over the lips, whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality in a man of his years. For the rest, his ears were pale and at the tops extremely pointed; the chin was broad and strong, and the cheeks firm though thin. The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor. (1897) 1996, 22)*

Perhaps such large canine teeth would have offended spectator sensibilities at the time; yet, after *El vampiro*, these fangs would be incorporated into almost every subsequent film. At the same time, on his journey to visit the Gonzales family, Mr. Duval steps out of his carriage momentarily to feed on a peasant child and he does so in the presence of the child's mother. Such a scene would have been unusual for vampire films before 1957. In this way, the Mexican vampire is gifted with more animalistic or aggressive behavior than previously seen in films. He is, in effect, a more intimidating vampire than his filmic predecessors.

Mr. Duval is trying to purchase the hacienda, Sicomoros, from the esteemed Gonzales family that owns the estate on which Count Karol de Lavud, the villain's brother, is seemingly buried. Mr. Duval has two sinister aims: to resurrect his dead brother, who was murdered one hundred years ago by the town peasants, and then, along with him, to conquer the rest of the country. His plan will only work if he is able to purchase the hacienda from the Gonzales siblings: Emilio, Eloisa, and María Teresa.

The rest of the family does not realize that Eloisa has already been turned into a vampire and that she is scheming along with Mr. Duval to take the land they refuse to sell from Emilio and María Teresa. They first try to eliminate María Teresa by giving her a secret powder that places her in a living-dead state. Because she is presumed dead, she is buried alive in the family crypt. With María Teresa's supposed death, Marta, her niece, is now in a vulnerable position as heir, therefore becoming yet another obstacle and object of Mr. Duval's evil desire. He, of course, plans to convert her into a vampire as he did with Eloisa.

It is significant to point out that the name Count Lavud is a palindrome for Duval, which clearly appropriates a play on words not uncommon in vampire literature. Examples of wordplay are present in the novel *Carmilla* (1872) by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, in which the female vampire is known by the anagrammatic names Carmilla, Mircalla, and Millarca. Similarly, the hero, Enrique, will later discover Mr. Duval's sinister lineage when he holds a mirror up to Count Lavud's epitaph and deciphers the name. What is significant about the surname *Duval* is the origin, which is clearly French, suggesting the role of France in the Mexican imaginary and national identity after the French invasion of 1862 and the reign of Maximilian. At the same time, the title *Count* is a clear reference to European nobility, which further marks him as a foreigner in Mexican land.

## REAFFIRMING THE MEXICAN NATIONAL IMAGINARY

The reaffirmation of national identity is not only played out in the image of the vampire, but also realized through other characters. Most important, María Teresa, who is buried alive but later saved by her faithful and very Catholic servants, is visually different than her vampire sister, Eloisa. The fair-skinned and ageless Eloisa is more akin to the typical vampire vixen: young, seductive, erotic, and evil. At the same time, she is elegantly dressed in a black fitted gown with a plunging neckline. One of the first supernatural appearances begins with the introduction of Eloisa's character. As Marta and Enrique are walking at night toward the hacienda, Eloisa magically appears at the crossroads and secretly follows them. When she arrives at the hacienda, she is transformed into a bat and then mysteriously reappears at the top of the staircase to greet Marta. This appearance and transformation reveal that evil has already violated the sanctity of the Gonzales home.

Eloisa's placement at the crossroads is also very significant. The crossroads is a metaphorically charged space that is most commonly used to describe one's figurative position in life, but it is also frequently used as a metaphor for the transition to the afterlife. In Eastern European folklore, it is often the place where those suspected of vampirism are interred because the crossroads bears the form of a cross. A wide range of deviant behavior can mark one as a potential vampire. For example, those who have died by suicide or while drunk can become vampires. Criminals, bastards, witches, magicians, and even the excommunicated are among those who can become vampires and are therefore buried at the crossroads (see McNally and Florescu 1994, 121–23). It is believed that when they return as the undead, they will be confused at the intersections of roads and hence be unable to find their way home. This place where the roads meet is also important in Mexican folklore, because the mythical monster *Cihuatateo* is sometimes considered to be a vampire who stalks travelers at the crossroads. *Cihuatateo* is the "Celestial Princess" and demonic female who roamed paths and haunted crossroads to maim and kill (see Glendinnen 1991, 82). The placement of Eloisa at a crossroads clearly situates her in a place that denotes evil.

Seemingly, Eloisa has invited the vampire to cross the threshold and she has given herself to Mr. Duval, thereby becoming a traitor to the family. The female duplicity played out in this film recalls representations of La Malinche, Hernán Cortés's interpreter, guide, and mistress, as well as later a quintessential symbol of national betrayal. She played an important role in the conquest of the Aztec empire in the sixteenth century and has since been made into the archetypal traitor and thus without honor. In this way,

the film plays with the Mexican imaginary in which female betrayal could be understood in very specific historical terms.

María Teresa, on the other hand, is very different from her traitorous sister, Eloisa. Unlike her sister, she has darker and more mestizo features. She also has long, black, disheveled hair with long, gray streaks that make her look haggard. Instead of wearing a fitted gown, she wears a cloak-like black dress. More important, she appears in almost every scene carrying a large crucifix, which underscores both her faith and her yearning to exorcise the vampires. She is neither an object of desire nor the source of malevolence, but rather the quintessential devout Catholic and mestizo woman who will ultimately bring about the demise of the monsters. Even though she is presumed dead, she wanders through the secret passageways and trapdoors of the hacienda like a spirit seeking to protect the family from the menacing vampires.

While Eloisa might remind spectators of the ultimate betrayal embodied in the image of La Malinche, María Teresa's character evokes yet another culturally important female, but in this case she is the epitome of virtue, the Virgin Mary. María Teresa's name may refer not only to the Virgin Mary, but her name could also be alluding to the *Virgen de Santa Teresa del Niño Jesús* or *Santa Teresa de Avila*, both important Catholic saints of the Carmelite order who are said to be under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Although the romantic hero, Enrique, accompanies and saves the heroine from the clutches of the vampire, it is the saintly female figure who will cast out the evil from the hacienda. With seemingly supernatural strength, María Teresa is ultimately responsible for annihilating the vampires. In the final climactic scene, she strangles her sister, the vampire and traitor, and she also drives a stake through the heart of Mr. Duval, therefore singlehandedly ending the vampire invasion. It is unusual to have a female figure as vampire killer portrayed in such aggressive terms. In the novel *Dracula*, it is Van Helsing and other male figures who drive the stake through the hearts of many of the vampires, but here there is an inversion of gender roles. In *Nosferatu*, for example, Count Orlock dies as a result of seduction on the part of a woman who is his object of desire. In the final scene of that film, he is engrossed with sucking her blood that he does not notice the threatening sun rays that cause him to disintegrate. Thus, the female provokes the vampire's annihilation through seduction and not through direct physical violence.

In *El vampiro*, the female figure is the one who has the power to vanquish evil and prevent an apocalypse. When cast within the Mexican context—with a prevailing Catholic culture in which *La Virgen de Guadalupe* receives the most fervent veneration—it is not surprising that the virgin-like mestizo

woman is the one to banish the demonic monsters. Since Mexican independence, *La Virgen de Guadalupe* has been a symbol of *mexicanidad*: she is the synthesis of the Indian goddess and the Virgin Mary. In his study of the Mexican madonna, William B. Taylor describes the phenomena in terms that are pertinent to this discussion:

*The story of the apparition in 1531, just ten years after the Aztec capital at Tenochtitlan fell to Cortés, is rich in providential possibilities—a dark-complected Virgin appears to a lowly Indian in Tepeyac, the sacred place of pre-Columbian goddess, leaving her beautiful image on the Indian's cloak. Then, in a spontaneous surge of Indian devotion, natives flock to the site of the miracle, embracing her image in their spiritual orphanhood as if she were the new mother restoring order in the supernatural world as well as in the here and now. She combines the Indian past with the Spanish present to make something new, a proto-Mexican Indian Madonna who will gradually be accepted as well by American Spaniards and mestizos as their own thus forming the spiritual basis of a national independence movement in the early 19th century. (quoted in Poole 1995, 5)*

The vampire killer, María Teresa, could be seen as the incarnation of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*: like her, she restores order in the supernatural world by casting out the vampires from the hacienda and, by analogy, from Mexico. María Teresa's role in the film recalls images of the various representations of the Virgin Mary holding a spear over a dragon to prevent the apocalypse. This is a very significant detail because the same image is replayed in the final scene when she is standing over the vampire with a stake. As Raymond McNally has already noted, Dracula's name was associated not only with the devil but also with a dragon. The historical Draculas (Vlad the Impaler) family crest included the image of a dragon—the name *Dracul* signifying dragon in Romanian (see McNally and Florescu 1994, 8–9). In the end, María Teresa is the national heroine who vanquishes the foreign other who was threatening the sanctity of home and nation.

The film seemingly recalls national myths through its representation of female characters, and it also reaffirms Mexican identity vis-à-vis France and French culture. In terms of national identity, Mexico has had a complex relationship with France: on the one hand, France is a cultural and intellectual model for Mexico, especially among the elite, but on the other hand, France is also a country that invaded Mexico twice during the nineteenth century. These incursions are emblematic moments in the construction of

Mexican nationalism. Furthermore, the film was released in 1957, which also happens to be the centennial celebration of the 1857 constitution.

In Mexico, as in other Western cultures, centennial celebrations have always been important moments used to reaffirm national identity, which suggests that the constant and unrestrained mention of the centennial by several of the characters in the film is purposeful. By recalling the centennial of the first vampire assault that was said to have happened sometime around 1840, the film seems to point to the first French invasion of Mexico, known as the Pastry War (1838). In this odd historical episode, a French pastry chef complained to French King Louis-Philippe that his shop had been looted by Mexican officials. France used this affront along with defaulting loans to invade Mexico and recover some of those debts (see MacLachlan and Beezley 2010, 61–62). The Battle of Puebla, which took place on May 5, 1862, is a military triumph that is important in the Mexican imaginary: the well-armed invading French soldiers sent by Napoleon III were defeated by their poorly armed Mexican counterparts, some of whom only had machetes. The Battle of Puebla is often cited to underscore Mexican valor and courage in the most dire of circumstances.

Due to years of civil unrest, Mexico was in a weakened position, rendering it susceptible to invasion. Napoleon III of France—often described in vampiric terms by Victor Hugo—was ready to feed on the wealth of a weaker nation. The historian Kristine Ibsen's description of Mexico echoes this vampire metaphor: "Defenseless, and weak, the homeland had been left vulnerable to the parasitical European powers" (quoted in MacLachlan and Beezley 2010, 25). Under the guise of a "civilizing mission" and uniting the "Latin race," Napoleon III of France chose to invade Mexico (see Ibsen 2010, 2). Given that the occupation of Mexico was both politically and financially advantageous, he sent troops to Mexico under the pretext of collecting outstanding loans. In 1864, Napoleon III also named Archduke Fernando Maximilian, along with his wife Carlota of Belgium, emperor and empress of Mexico. The temporary occupation that ended in 1867 was short-lived and resulted in the execution of Maximilian and the expulsion of the French troops. The film subtly alludes to the Napoleonic invasion and to the empress when the tomb of Count Lavud first appears on the screen. The date printed on the epitaph reads "Enero 19, 1840," which corresponds to the birth year of Carlota of Belgium (June 7, 1840) and the month and day of her death (January 19, 1927). As Ibsen underscores, the emperor and empress were significant figures in the imagining of national identity and therefore the inclusion of these dates cannot be accidental: "Extravagantly theatrical yet resistant to preconceived divisions and easy categorizations, the story

of the ill-fated emperors has alternately been regarded as the last vestige of a dying order, and as the catalyst for the formation of Mexican national identity" (2010, viii).

More important, in terms of historical context, this 1957 film was released as the government was seeking dramatic ways to commemorate the 1857 constitution, the reforms, and the death of Benito Juárez (see Weeks 1987, 114). These centennial celebrations lasted from the late 1950s through the late 1960s. Benito Juárez, a mythic hero for many, was called the "Moses of equality" and became one of Mexico's most deified symbols (see Ibsen 2010, 8). He is one of the most popular historical figures who embody *mexicanidad*: a man of Zapotec Indian ancestry and humble beginnings who eventually became president of the country. In an act designed to reaffirm the republic and to repudiate the assault, he was also responsible for the execution of Maximilian, despite international pleas. As a way to remember his contribution to the restoration of the republic, the government erected a large monument of Juárez on the site of Maximilian's execution during the centennial celebrations (see Weeks 1987, 114). A coin bearing the bust of Juárez was also minted in 1957. These official commemorative celebrations and gestures underscore that the resistances to the multiple French interventions are important moments in the national imaginary that help to define Mexican identity: Mestizo, Indian, Criollo, Spanish, but never French.

Similarly, José Vasconcelos, a philosopher and an influential figure in the forging of a national identity in postrevolutionary Mexico, wrote on this subject in his book, *La raza cósmica* (1925). In it, he celebrates *mexicanidad* by recalling the various cultures that constitute the nation: Indians, colonizing Europeans (from Spain), and African slaves. In other words, in official discourse, the indigenous cultures, the Spanish conquerors, and the African slaves are recognized as belonging to the Mexican national identity. This confirms the observation of critic Carlos Monsiváis (2003) that the Mexican film industry promoted cultural nationalism through the incorporation of edifying moments such as national celebrations and historical events. It is thus not surprising that many of the characters in the film recall the centennial of the vampire invasion, reminding the spectator of the important moments in the national past. In other words, this film could be understood as another form of reaffirming notions of identity by emphasizing the threat embodied in the vampire, which, as I have argued, is negotiated through Mexico's complicated involvement with France in the nineteenth century.

In my discussion, I have followed the journey of the vampire from the Americas to Europe and back in order to analyze the ways in which the monster is articulated in each cultural context. In the films, the vampire is

a menacing figure that arrives seeking to infect, invade, and conquer. At the same time, he is potentially a subversive other that transgresses borders and threatens stability. The vampire figure can be understood as an agent that expresses certain cultural fears at very specific social and political crossroads. As many critics have suggested, in US and European films, the vampire figure embodies anxieties and fears about immigration, in particular because the films were produced during a time when certain ethnic groups were treated aggressively and even expelled from their adopted homelands.

When the anthropomorphized bat was reappropriated by Mexican filmmakers in the 1950s, the vampire men and the bat deities—such as those found in pre-Columbian culture and codices—seem to have been permanently buried under the Europeanized vampire monster. In its place, the monster that appears on the Mexican silver screen is yet another version of the literary vampire as first created by Bram Stoker in the nineteenth century, a projection that we can find in almost every film ever since. In *El vampiro*, as in other vampire films, the menacing monster that invades, crosses borders, and threatens identity must be cast out or killed so that order may be restored. In the case of Mexico, the foreign threat embodied in the vampire calls to mind historical events having to do with French invasion and expulsion, which were founding moments in the nation's history, as seen in the many centennial celebrations of the late 1950s.

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