

FROM LUGOS TO HOLLYWOOD: BELA LUGOSI'S TRANSNATIONAL PERSONA AND THE AURAL CONSTRUCTION OF DRACULA IN TOD BROWNING'S *DRACULA* (1931)¹

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Abstract

In horror literature, acoustic elements heighten sensory engagement and audience immersion in an atmosphere of dread, manipulate psychology, and help transcending the boundaries of imagination. "Bram Stoker's Dracula" (1897) masterfully employs voice, sound, and silence to construct Count Dracula's enigmatic presence, and intensify his uncanny duality as aristocratic seducer and primal predator. This paper examines how Tod Browning's 1931 adaptation transposes Stoker's acoustic strategies into cinematic language through Bela Lugosi's vocal performance and the minimalist soundscape of the film, at the same time arguing that the transnational identity of the actor shaped Dracula's Gothic allure. Bela Lugosi was born Béla Ferenc Dezső Blaskó in Lugos, Austria-Hungary (nowadays Lugoj, Romania), and adopted his stage name both as tribute to his hometown and due to its sonic resonance, that made it highly merchantable, a diasporic gesture that tied him forever to his Central-Eastern European origins, despite being marketed as an icon of exotic horror by Hollywood. Through close analysis of Lugosi's voice, used with deliberate, hypnotic cadence in an English language with a Hungarian accent, and theatrical physicality, paired with the use of silence, diegetic sound, and Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake motif, this study interrogates how auditory aesthetics and Lugosi's embodiment of foreignness converged to craft Dracula's enduring legacy. By bridging literary analysis with film studies, this work explores a central question: What facets of Lugosi's personal charisma, theatrical training, and diasporic identity transformed his portrayal into a cultural archetype that continues to captivate audiences worldwide nearly a century later?

Keywords: Bela Lugosi; Dracula; transnational persona; voice; sound; foreignness.

Introduction

One of the most noteworthy icons of Gothic horror, the figure of Count Dracula is the result of Bram Stoker's literary genius merged with Bela Lugosi's poignant embodiment of the Count in Tod Browning's 1931 film adaptation, *Dracula*. From its origins as a vampire of the Victorian-era to a global icon of Otherness, a metaphor for anxieties about race, sexuality, and foreign invasion, Dracula has cemented its place in the cultural imagination through Lugosi's

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artistic portrayal. His piercing gaze, his hypnotic speaking rhythm, and his full, baritone voice with Hungarian accent and inflections assisted Lugosi in transforming Stoker's enigmatic aristocrat into a paradox, that is a figure coming from the Central-Eastern European folklore and refracted through the lens of exotic menace of Hollywood cinema. This article argues that the creation of Lugosi's Dracula owes its enduring power primarily to sonorous elements which fused Stoker's acoustic horror with the actor's diasporic identity, growing a Gothic archetype that continues to unnerve the reader. Stoker constructs Dracula through absence and suggestion inside a mosaic of diaries, letters, and newspaper clippings. His voice is not his own but mediated by the accounts of the other characters and the uncanny soundscape of howling wolves, creaking doors, eerie music, and primal silences.

Tod Browning's film, by contrast, gave Dracula a body, a face, and above all, a voice - a voice that was ineradicably shaped by Lugosi's Central-Eastern European heritage. His deliberate cadence, his unique rolling r's, and the theatrical pauses in speaking transformed dialogue into incantation, while the scarce soundscape of the film (Tchaikovsky's ballet music *Swan Lake*, the howling of wolves, the creak of coffin lids, the squeak of some rodents) amplified his uncanny duality as aristocratic seducer and primal predator. Lugosi's performance was both a triumph of horror cinema and a negotiation of identity - emigrating from a fractured Austro-Hungarian Empire to Hollywood, the world's film capital, in 1920, at the beginning of the Jazz Age, Lugosi carried with him the cultural baggage of a region mythologized by the West as a land of superstition and danger. His stage name, Lugosi - meaning 'from Lugos' in Hungarian, became both a badge of heritage and a brand of exoticism, encapsulating the tension between his roots and his reinvention.

This study bridges literary analysis and film studies to explore how Stoker's acoustic strategies were reimaged through Lugosi's transnational artistic lens. By dissecting the sonic architecture of the novel, we find that Dracula's power lies in whispers, silence, and the dissonant sounds of the nature, while by analysing Tod Browning's film, we notice how these elements were translated into cinematic language, with Lugosi's voice and physicality serving as conduits for both terror and allure. To end this paper, we briefly interrogate Lugosi's legacy as a contested symbol of cultural memory. A Hungarian émigré, largely unacknowledged in Romania during the communist era, partly due to his association with Western cinema and his Hungarian ethnicity, Lugosi has been symbolically reclaimed by post-communist Romania, yet forever frozen in the imagination of Hollywood and the cinema as the primordial vampire. In an era of renewed debates over identity and representation, Bela Lugosi's Dracula demonstrates the enduring power of sound, voice, and the unresolved spectre of the foreign "Other".

1. The Novel

Amongst the tools a writer employs with the intention of building a story and immersing it in an evocative atmosphere, acoustic elements hold a distinct role, particularly within horror fiction. This genre uniquely engages the senses of the reader, provoking visceral emotions and unsettling sensations. It unleashes and heightens the imagination, compelling the reader to step beyond their comfort zones and confront perspectives that challenge their perceived boundaries. Such dynamics are central to Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*, where Count Dracula and the other characters unfold their stories within spaces populated with sounds of diverse origins.

Despite being the central figure of the novel, Count Dracula does not speak directly to the reader but is introduced, described, insinuated, or narrated from different perspectives and in a fragmentary way by several characters in the book, via their written words in the form of journals, letters, log entries, newspaper cuttings, or telegrams. The auditory experience of the reader is shaped by the epistolary format of the novel, and all these fragmented accounts might reflect the disorienting effect of some sounds in the narrative.

It has been argued by critics over the time that too little space has been given to Dracula's voice in the novel, but notwithstanding his not having a voice of his own, and regardless of making his appearance only on a few pages in the book, the Count is almost omnipresent. His presence, be it real, felt or imagined, adds a lot to the atmosphere of mystery and mysticism, and the terror he brings or transmits is felt anyway. The reader first finds what Count Dracula looks and sounds like from his visitor, the young solicitor Jonathan Harker. Being an alert, meticulous, and rational observer, Harker registers everything in detail in his shorthand kept diary so that he can later relate his experiences to his beloved fiancée Mina.

The introduction of Dracula is masterfully orchestrated through a symphony of sensory details in which sound plays an essential role in foreshadowing his supernatural menace. Although we may infer only later that it was him, the Count's first appearance in the person of the caleche driver is anticipated by a range of wild sounds coming from the frenzied reactions of the horses, described as neighing, snorting, and plunging wildly, as if instinctively recoiling from an invisible terror. The panic of the animals mirrors the collective fear of the peasants, who respond with "a chorus of screams" and with ritualistic gestures, desperately crossing themselves as a form of protection from the evil. (Stoker 1897 / 2011, p. 11) This auditory chaos begins before Harker even glimpses the driver, setting the stage for his first appearance: a shadowy figure whose physical description is fragmented. His imposing height, long beard, and wide-brimmed hat obscure his identity, but the lamplight catches two unnerving details: "the gleam of a pair of very bright eyes, which seemed red in the lamplight", and "a hard-looking mouth, with very red lips and sharp-looking teeth, as white as ivory" (Stoker 1897 / 2011, pp. 11-12) When speaking to the coachman, the man already reveals something important about himself: "You cannot deceive me, my friend; I know too much, and my horses are swift" (Stoker 1897 / 2011, p. 12). This cryptic remark, declaring his own omniscience and the swiftness of his horses, hints at a deeper, almost predatory awareness of the situation, positioning him as a figure of both mystery and control. The man speaks excellent German when attending to the passenger, then he speaks "soothingly" to the horses and whispers in their ears to calm them down. He is in deep control of the whole situation in which both the passenger and the horses are frightened by the agonized wailing of a dog, the sound of which is taken up by other dogs and then borne on the wind through the pass until it becomes a wild howling coming from all over the place, and culminating with the "louder and sharper" howling of the wolves (Stoker 1897 / 2011, p. 13) The driver remains unnervingly composed, soothing the terrified horses with whispered assurances, a gesture that contrasts starkly with his earlier imperious demeanour. The scene reaches its climax when the wolves encircle the carriage in a silence that make them look "a hundred times more terrible" then when they howled, a moment that underscores the tension between noise and the absence of sound as tools of horror. (Stoker 1897 / 2011, p. 15) The driver's abrupt, authoritative command disperses the wolves instantly, reinforcing his supernatural dominion over both the natural and the bestial. (Stoker 1897 / 2011, p. 16) Through these layered soundscapes, Stoker constructs Dracula as a liminal figure: a cultured polyglot fluent in German and later, in the person of the Count himself, English, yet one whose true power lies in his ability to manipulate primal forces.

The auditory motif of anticipation repeats itself once the Count is formally introduced at the gates of his castle. His approach is heralded by the harsh, mechanical sounds of a long dormant fortress, even before he materializes: "rattling chains", "clanking of massive bolts drawn back", and the thud of heavy footsteps, noises that evoke an industrial, almost infernal atmosphere. (Stoker 1897 / 2011, p. 18). These aural elements align Dracula's dwelling with both medieval Gothic tropes and a more modern, mechanistic dread. When the Count finally greets Harker, his speech, delivered in impeccable yet oddly accented English, mixes hospitality with indirect, concealed threat. His repeated invitations for Harker to "enter freely" and "leave something of the happiness" he brings (Stoker 1897 / 2011, pp. 18-19) carry an

ironic undercurrent, as the castle, Dracula's house, is about to become Harker's prison rather than his temporary housing too.

The theatrical manner in which Dracula introduces himself resounds as a declaration of identity and, at the same time, as a performative act, designed to disarm and intimidate Harker. The author's choice to juxtapose the Count's polished language with the dissonant soundscape of the castle highlights his duality: a nobleman whose primordial savagery lies hidden under the veneer of civility.

This interplay of sound and silence reaches its peak during the arrival of Dracula to England aboard the *Demeter*. The traditional Gothic reliance on visual horror is inverted here by Stoker: the thick fog obscures sight, therefore the audience (both the characters and readers) are forced to rely on the sense of hearing. What we get is an overwhelming auditory panorama of thunder roars, waves crash, unseen wolves howl, all in a crescendo that mirrors the chaos of the Count's earlier appearances (Stoker 1897 / 2011, pp. 94-95). The author suggests that such primal, unstructured noise holds a unique power over the human psyche, as it draws the reader into the limitless terrors of the imagination. The vampire embodies this concept himself, dismissing human music, a symbol of order and civilization, and praising with chilling admiration the more superior, to him, "music" of the wolves (Stoker 1897 / 2011, p. 22). Dracula's reverence for these "children of the night", as he candidly calls the wolves, indicates him as a connoisseur of chaos, a figure who thrives in the liminal space between the civilized and the wild.

Dracula's role as an orchestrator of fear is further cemented through his voice, whose versatility makes it a weapon, an instrument of control. His voice shifts fluidly between tones: soothing whispers to calm horses, harsh metallic commands to summon wolves, and hypnotic sweetness to ensnare Lucy (Stoker 1897 / 2011, pp. 54, 163). This chameleonic ability reflects his broader manipulation of environments and individuals: his whispered orders are answered by the howls of distant wolves, as if he were the conductor of an unseen orchestra of beasts (Stoker 1897, 2011, p. 59). Stoker repeatedly emphasises Dracula's voice and its qualities, like texture, cadence, and emotional range that allow it to transcend language itself.

By weaving the discussed auditory motifs throughout the novel, Bram Stoker conceives Count Dracula not merely as a villain, but as an embodiment of primal, anti-civilizational forces. His power to master sound through silencing wolves, orchestrating storms, or weaponizing his own voice, makes Dracula a perverse inversion of human artistry. Where composers create harmony, Dracula conducts dissonance, and where poets craft meaning, he traffics in terror. This acoustic portrait challenges readers to confront fear as a sensory and psychological experience, one that cannot be fully rationalized or contained.

This intricate soundscape stands in stark contrast to the visual and performative horror of Tod Browning's 1931 film adaptation, which translated Dracula's menace into the language of cinema—a medium reliant on sight, gesture, and dramatic silence.

2. The Film

Tod Browning's film *Dracula*, released in 1931, based on the stage play versions written by Hamilton Deane in 1924, and rewritten by John L. Balderston in 1927, marked one of the most important cinematic moments in the horror genre and set Bela Lugosi's interpretation of Count Dracula as an important landmark in the history of the cinema.

Before transferring his character from stage to screen, Bela Lugosi had played and perfected it on Broadway, in New York, and Los Angeles. The role is said to be his own creation, all composition in theatrical manner, emerged from within, in no need of fangs and heavy makeup, but displaying an *otherworldly charisma, stiff gestures, pauses and odd cadences* in his speaking (Shelton, 2019, p. 108). He was a man of the stage, in possession of all the necessary ingredients that make a great actor: good, masculine looks, deep, guttural

voice, and a Hungarian accent that sounded striking to the public. In Arthur Lennig's *The Immortal Count* we find that Lugosi had a "quite remarkable baritone voice" (Lennig, 2010, p. 20), "a good singing voice" (Lennig, 2010, p. 21), "a sublime baritone voice with its distinctive intonation and diction" (Lennig, 2010, p. 170), "a commanding voice" (Lennig, 2010, p. 244), "a warm, suave voice" (Lennig, 2010, p. 408), "a firm voice" (Lennig, 2010, p. 426), "a voice with a strange intonation and measured cadence" that he also calls *That Voice* (Lennig, 2010, p. 4) when referring to what persisted of Lugosi towards the end of his acting career. Cited in Lennig's book is Bela Kálmány who, in his article published in Színházy Ujság in Szeged, described young actor Bela Lugossy's (he became Lugosi in 1911) voice as rich, melancholic, and velvety, going straight to the audience's hearts. (Lennig, 2010, p. 23).

The role of Count Dracula blends Lugosi's physical qualities with the mesmerising powers of his face and the 'evil eye' look, the slow delivery of the lines in a deep voice with odd inflections, and the carefully lit close-ups (Lennig 2010, p. 107). The film is the first sound version and, for various reasons, no music score was composed for it. The only musical background heard in the film consists of short fragments from *Swan Lake* by Tchaikovsky, *Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg* by Richard Wagner, and *The Unfinished Symphony* by Schubert. In 1999 a new version of the film was released, introducing Philip Glass' musical score performed by a quartet of strings. This paper, however, discusses the original version of the film, released in 1931.

The squeaks of some rodents and maybe of a bat, the barking of a dog and the howling of a wolf accompany Count Dracula's silent appearance in the film. The coachman waiting for Renfield is silent too. No words but the 'evil eye' look. It is only inside the castle when the Count introduces himself with his famous line "I am...Dracula.", then greets Renfield with a simplified version of the formula used in the novel: "I bid you welcome". When hearing the wolf howling, Dracula voices his next famous lines "Listen to them. Children of the night. What music they make!" More than the slow delivery of these lines, it is interesting to note the accent he places on *them*, *children*, and *they*, by elongating the vowels the same as in "I bid you...welcome", suggesting the importance given to these creatures and also the bond between them and the Count, the rolling r's as in "I am ... *Dracula*", "...*children*", or as in this "hissing" alliteration "*The spider spinning his web for the unwary fly*", a sibilance that creates a sense of confusion visible, in fact, on Harker's face. Dracula maintains eye contact with Renfield and never blinks, keeping his characteristic posture. Despite his elegance and his manners, the slow movements and the way of speaking, with his foreign accent, are so bizarre that just add to Renfield's confusion.

The voice is sweet and it all sounds like an invitation to listen to something that really is important (them). Sweetly inviting yet unnervingly alien, Dracula's voice does much more than seduce Renfield – it linguistically expands the boundaries of his monstrous kinship. The definite article is missing in front of 'children' and that may imply that other beings, too, fall into the same category of nocturnal beasts, unlike the novel where the wolves and no other creatures are *the children of the night*. This omission implies that Dracula's dominion extends beyond wolves and bats or other non-human creatures, to include his brides, whose silent, spectral presence in the castle represent a shared nocturnal Otherness. The brides, like the wolves, and ultimately Lucy herself, later in the story, become extensions of Dracula's aural persona: creatures bound to him not by fear, but by the unspoken allure of his foreignness.

Contrary to the novel, where he speaks toughly to his brides and sends them away in a commanding tone, Dracula uses a simple, gentle, but very firm gesture of the hand to make them leave Renfield. This aural ambiguity mirrors Dracula's physical command: just as his voice lures Renfield into a false sense of intimacy, his silent, almost courtly gesture of dismissal emphasises his transnational hybridity. Lugosi's character wields power not through overt violence, but through the hypnotic authority of his voice and body, representing a fusion of European theatricality and visual grammar of the nascent sound-era in Hollywood cinema. The

novel, on the other hand, makes good use of acoustic imagery in a situation when describing physical gestures would belittle the sensory effect of the scene.

This tension between sound and silence, somehow paralleling the tension between European theatricality and Hollywood's sound-era restraint, culminates in Dracula's journey to England. Aboard the *Vesta*, his vocal absence becomes its own kind of power. The earlier dynamic between Dracula and Renfield is now inverted, with the Count's wordless, icy-glare and Renfield's maniacal laughter auralizing Dracula's complete domination. This time, his silence amplifies the foreign threat, rendering him an inscrutable force lurking within the creaking hull of the ship. When he makes his appearance in London, however, Dracula re-embodies his hybrid persona, this time procuring himself a different weapon – the modern soundscape of the city. As soon as the Count sets foot in the streets of London, looking elegant and revigorated, he enters the atmosphere animated by street noises, cars, a young girl selling violets, making it his new stage. Dracula makes use of his mesmerizing powers again, and we soon hear the girl screaming, then the passers-by, the whistle of a policeman, people gathering around the collapsed, lifeless body of the girl.

The Count speaks his first words since his arrival in England at the Opera House where Wagner's music is played and where he instructs the ticket girl to do something under hypnosis. He soon introduces himself to Dr Seward, Lucy, Mina, and Harker, as the new tenant at Carfax Abbey. The third and last time when music is played in the film is in Lucy's bedroom on a music box while she and Mina discuss about their new acquaintance. Mina makes fun of his style of talking and his accent, but Lucy finds him fascinating. Browning exploits Lugosi's Hungarian accent, slow and deliberate, that sounds exotic to American audiences - funny to Mina, fascinating to Lucy. Mina's mockery reveals the subtext of Lugosi's vocal performance that marks Dracula as a linguistic outsider, a threat to the anglophone order of the 1930s America. Lucy's fascination reveals the paradox of Lugosi's transnational persona: the Hungarian inflection of his voice, though coded as foreign and grotesque to Mina's ears, seduces through its exoticism, and Lugosi's voice becomes a site of cultural contradiction: repulsive in its Otherness, reflecting the post-WWI anxieties of European "contamination", yet alluring in its aristocratic mystique. This duality mirrors the very ambivalence of Hollywood towards foreignness, with Lugosi's Dracula both a monster to be vanquished and a romanticized emblem of decadence in the Old World. Consequently, his foreign accent, far from being a mere coincidence or just an oddity, amplifies the transnational anxiety of the era, transforming Dracula into a figure who is both feared and desired because he is foreign.

Things happen very fast in the film and Dracula makes his second victim the same night, when he comes to Lucy's window in the form of a bat, the next minute being beside her bed, as elegant as ever but cruel and merciless, and bites her. Just as the howling of the wolves signal his presence and the brides obey his silent gestures, Lucy's transformation into a vampire is precipitated by Dracula's voice: his accented whispers at her bedroom window, paired with the diegetic sound of fluttering bat wings, audibly maps her seduction into his transnational orbit. This shift from mocking his accent to succumbing to his hypnotic cadence mirrors the broader tension in the film between xenophobic ridicule and exotic fascination. Like the Romantic leitmotifs borrowed from Tchaikovsky's and Wagner's music, Lucy's corruption represents the Old World infiltrating the modern soundscape. Once corrupted, Lucy's body and voice harmonize with Dracula's dissonant Otherness.

Dracula is associated with animals like bats and wolves and many times his presence is anticipated by sounds that they produce. He communicates with Renfield telepathically, usually at a sign given by a wolf's howl. In his paper about the avatars and the mutations of Count Dracula as Gothic figure, Giles Menegaldo (2005) considers Dracula a cinematic figure par excellence and speaks about the ambivalence of his status: a predator and a malefic being but, at

the same time, a character of a noble origin who inspires contradictory feelings in his victims: terror, repulsion or, quite the opposite, fascination, devotion, admiration, a voluntary desire to transgress limits and rules. Menegaldo (2005) also argues that the rare moments when Dracula produces a certain effect on the modern viewer who is less sensitive to his melodramatic style, are the close ups when his face becomes a primitive mask and an archaic figure of cruelty (Menegaldo, 2005, p. 207). His powers, although limited, are significant enough to produce important changes in the other characters, to manipulate and command them, to change the way they perceive him, and to allow him to transform into a bat, a wolf, or even fog. The physical appearance of this “attractive, flamboyant, and confident man” (Lennig, 2010, p.249) is what first impacts the viewer, but then his voice, with caring and sensual modulations, delineates his elaborated and persuasive discourse (Menegaldo, 2005, p. 210).

Silver and Ursini (1997) consider somehow ironic the fact that Lugosi, who moved from the stage production to the film role of Lon Chaney’s Sr.’s untimely death should

so completely become Dracula, that the countenance and speech of this quasi-fictional Carpathian boyar should be so irrevocably linked with Lugosi’s pallid expressions and peculiar rendering of what Stoker dubbed a ‘strange intonation’ (Silver & Ursini, 1997, p. 60).

The “accent and florid gestures”, the “thick Good Ev-e-ning” and, we would add, the declamatory “I am Dracula”, the rolling r’s (already discussed), the caped and top-hatted image are unmistakably Lugosi’s (Silver & Ursini, 1997, p. 61). Dracula’s portrait in Tod Browning’s film differs a lot from that imagined by Stoker and, comparing all the interpreters of Count Dracula in film versions, Silver and Ursini conclude that Bela Lugosi’s incarnation dominated the role and infused it with his personal mannerisms like no other. (Silver & Ursini, 1997, p.61) In my opinion, Lugosi was well aware of his vocal qualities. He is cited in Lennig’s biographical book saying that he had a quite remarkable voice. It is no wonder that he rejected the role of Frankenstein that would have muted him completely on screen. To support the fact that his voice was indeed, exceptional, stay the radio recordings using Bela Lugosi’s voice, like Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Tell-Tale Heart*, his interviews on radio and tv, and so on and so forth. In analysing some of Lugosi’s film characters, Paul Batters (2017) speaks about the actor’s voice and the way he used it: “Harsh, gruff and menacing in tone, Lugosi makes Ygor a fuller and meatier villain in great part due to the effective use of his voice.” (Son of Frankenstein), “Lugosi’s voice is also commanding, delivering with intimidation as his eyes burn into those upon whom he fixes his gaze” (White Zombie), “The supposed weaknesses of his voice are at full advantage when he speaks, with the deliberation and control of one who need not rush for anyone” (Dracula). The importance of the voice in horror is underlined by Maiko Lenting (2010), a London based publisher for Hachette: “Horror is even more compelling in audio form because the delicious sense of dread and fear is so well pronounced through tone of voice” Lenting (2010) confesses that she could not read the book but she listened to the audiobook: “I dared not skip ahead in the audiobook (just to check if everyone was okay) like I easily do in a physical book. I loved that other-worldly captivation - especially with my noise-cancelling headphones. It sent wee chills down my spine.”

A penetrating analysis of Bela Lugosi’s voice can be found in Edgardo Franzosini’s book *Bela Lugosi – Biografia di una Metarmofosi* [Bela Lugosi – The biography of a metamorphosis – my translation]

Besides, Bela does not need to resort to particular ‘effects’ as far as sound is concerned: the natural resources with which he is endowed are enough for him, his voice is enough – (...) that voice that a historian of entertainment will not hesitate to qualify as ‘one of the most evocative music ever heard’. Lugosi used this instrument

of his with the same superfluity of sensitivity that blind players demonstrate and which derives from the fact that they are not 'distracted' by/ from the sense of sight.² (Franzosini, 1998, pp.62-63)

Bela Lugosi's voice transcended the role of Dracula to become a cultural artifact of transnational resonance. As Franzosini (1998) suggests, Lugosi's voice operated with the intuitive precision of a musician attuned to darkness, unburdened by any visual distraction. This acoustic mastery, evident in his radio performances and his on-screen whispers as Dracula, rendered him both an actor and an aural architect of dread. Silver and Ursini's irony that Lugosi, a Hungarian émigré, became inseparable from Stoker's Carpathian aristocrat, speaks to a deeper truth: Lugosi's voice did not just inhabit Dracula's foreignness, it redefined it for Hollywood, transforming Otherness into an indelible brand of seductive horror.

3. Bela Lugosi: The Man and The Actor

To conclude this study, we have chosen to gather some of the many testimonies coming from several co-starring actors and actresses, producers, and people who knew Lugosi. Their words confirm the idea we argue, that much of the characters he played, including that of his iconic Count Dracula, is due to his voice.

Producer John Mather met Lugosi in Britain in 1951, during his Dracula tour in which he performed 221 times in 22 cities. Because of the way Lugosi hurried and mumbled his lines during the rehearsals, Mather was about to cancel the tour. He changed his mind when the actor came to his part in character: "He stood erect and expanded his chest; a magnificent voice and presence filled the rehearsal hall" and he looked "40 again" (Dello Stritto & Brooks, 2001). Richard Butler, who played Harker on stage along Bela Lugosi in the 1951 British tour answered a reporter's question

What did you think of Bela Lugosi as an actor?" - "Oh, I thought he was first class. He had height and a stunning presence, no excess weight. He had saturnine looks, and his greatest asset of all, a superb voice. On stage this was produced so effortlessly. He could speak in a seeming menacing whisper at, say, The Hippodrome, Golders Green, and be heard at the back of the gallery. This is before the introduction of microphones on stage—a terrible practice! That's what surprised everyone, that he was such a wonderful stage actor. You get many people, like Olivier or instance, who give out when they're on, but don't give out so much when they're off, but he (Bela) wasn't a nonentity off stage. (Dello Stritto & Brooks, 1951)

As a person, Lugosi was seen as friendly, charming and accessible although he did not use to socialize much on set or outside of it. The actor would describe himself as a "lone wolf".

To Carroll Borland, the interpreter of Lucy on stage and later of Luna in "The Mark of the Vampire", Lugosi was "the most sexually attractive male" she had ever known in her life, with "beautiful, bright blue eyes".

In an interview, Alex Gordon, the sole publicity strategist for Renown Pictures, a small film distribution company that later expanded into production and operated in both theatre and cinema industries, reflected:

² Original text: "Bela non ha bisogno, del resto, di far ricorso a particolari <effetti> per quanto riguarda il sonoro: gli bastano le risorse naturali di cui è dotato, gli basta la voce – (...) quella voce che uno storico dello spettacolo non esiterebbe a qualificare come <una delle più suggestive musiche mai sentite>. Di questo suo strumento Lugosi si serviva con lo stesso sovrappiù di sensibilità che dimostrano di possedere i suonatori ciechi e che deriva loro dal fatto di non essere <distratti> dal senso della vista." (Franzosini, 1998, pp. 62-63)

In a way, I think Bela regretted having turned down the role of the Frankenstein Monster in the original movie that made Boris Karloff famous. Not many remember that Bela was actually a Shakespearean actor and a romantic star before he did Dracula and became typed in horror pictures. He played Hamlet and even Uncas in *The Last of the Mohicans* (6), among many other roles. I always thought the old Universal film, *The Raven*, was one of Bela's best roles, as well as *The Invisible Ray*, and of course his role of Ygor in the later Frankenstein pictures was unforgettable. It is strange for me now to see and hear Bela on TV in his old movies. It is as though he is still around and as though that friendly, uniquely unforgettable voice is still calling. His friends and fans will never forget him. (Lugosi, 2012)

These testimonies crystallize a paradox of his career: a Shakespearean-trained actor typecast as archetype of foreign menace in horror films, whose voice, both on and off screen, embodied the allure and alienation of his transnational identity. Mather's recollection of Lugosi "expanding his chest" to unleash a "magnificent voice" during rehearsals underlines how his vocal power became a transformative force defying age and artistic context. Butler's awe at Lugosi's effortless projection, a "menacing whisper" audible even in the furthest gallery, reveals a voice engineered from the pre-microphone stage, perfectly suited to the early sound era in Hollywood, where every accented syllable could seduce or unsettle. Carroll Borland's description of Lugosi as a sexually attractive man hints at the symbiotic relationship between his voice and visage. The former lent gravity to the latter, turning Dracula's stare into a silent extension of his acoustic command. Finally, Gordon's reflection on Lugosi's regret over rejecting the role of Frankenstein's mute monster further demonstrates the actor's self-awareness regarding his voice, and not his body, as an instrument of immortality. These accounts, taken together, affirm that Lugosi's voice was the conduit through which the actor channelled the transnational duality of Count Dracula, merging European theatricality and the burgeoning soundscape of Hollywood.

Conclusion

The question of what facets of Bela Lugosi's personal charisma, theatrical training, and diasporic identity transformed his portrayal into a cultural archetype that continues to captivate global audiences to this day may long be discussed and can probably be given more than one answer. However, it is absolutely certain that Lugosi was gifted with a theatrical, operatic voice, displaying so many inborn but also acquired qualities, some of which we have mentioned before in this paper.

In analysing a human voice there are several components to take into consideration: tone (clear, sweet), inflection (charismatic, soft, deep, guttural, harsh), accent, cadence and rhythm, rate (fast, slow), texture (velvety, metallic, hoarse), pitch, many of which apply to Lugosi's voice. His stage experience taught him how to use this personal asset in his acting, and that led to his outstanding interpretation of Count Dracula both on stage and screen.

Lugosi's voice, refined in European theatres and immortalized at Hollywood in the sound era, remains the defining element of his portrayal of Count Dracula on screen. Tod Browning's 1931 film, stripped of a traditional score, positioned Lugosi's baritone voice as its central aural motif, transforming, by all its characteristics, linguistic foreignness into a weapon of terror and seduction.

In the end, Lugosi's Dracula does not merely speak. He resonates, a dissonant chord in the symphony of American cinema, forever foreign, forever fascinating.

Our shared hometown honours Bela Lugosi's legacy through the *Bela Lugosi Cinema*, dedicated in his name, and a commemorative plaque installed on the house that now occupies the site of his birthplace.

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