

Humanities Institute  
Laura R. Kremmel, PhD

# Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror (1922)

F.W. Murnau

## Contents (Overview-Synopsis-Characters-Character Analysis-Themes-Scenes)

### OVERVIEW

Nosferatu is one of the most iconic horror films that few people have ever actually seen. The fact that it is a silent, black-and-white film that features a style of overacting that seems foreign to modern audiences makes it an intimidating or laborious viewing for some, but it remains an honored favorite among horror aficionados and film students. Seeing it in a theatre with a live orchestra, as intended, has a high impact on the viewer experience, and independent theatres in recent years have begun to recreate this type of event. Regardless, the character of Nosferatu has become an iconic image of the vampire, comparable only to Bela Lugosi's 1931 version of Dracula (though the director, F. W. Murnau, did work with Lugosi on an earlier film). Count Orlok's silhouette is as recognizable as Dracula's cape. The film's images of shadows creeping up stairways and of vampires framed in doorways have been used for book covers, t-shirts, events posters, as well as a slew of parodies and advertisements, including animated TV shows like *Spongebob Squarepants* and *The Simpsons*, and it has influenced every vampire feature film since. Recent films, like *What We Do in the Shadows*, clearly based specific characters on Nosferatu. In 2022, the film returned to theaters for its centennial, and it was given a new score by Hugh Doolan for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition.

### BACKGROUND

The German director F. W. Murnau had already directed several horror films before *Nosferatu*, including an adaptation of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. He served in the German army and air force during World War I and produced German propaganda films, fueling common antisemitic readings of *Nosferatu*, despite the number of Jewish creators he employed to work on the film. It was filmed in Germany and Slovakia, with specific scenes of Count Orlok's castle filmed at Orava Castle. Murnau eventually moved from Germany to Hollywood to continue his career. *Nosferatu* was produced by occultist Albin Grau, who influenced its artistic style and the visual appearance of the vampire, and he was joined by cinematographer Fritz Arno Wagner and Hans Erdmann, who wrote one of the first original scores in the movie business.

### HISTORY/LITERARY NOTES

One of the things that makes *Nosferatu* so influential is its lasting impact on the now classic horror and gothic trope of the vampire. Elements we now think of as cliché originated in in this film, like the prominence of shadows, the "jerky" movements of the vampire, and, most influential of all, the rule that vampires can be killed by sunlight. *Nosferatu* was the first to vanish in a puff of smoke when caught in a sunny window. But, anyone familiar with Bram Stoker's foundational 1897 novel *Dracula* will recognize most of the plot. While *Nosferatu* excludes the complexities of the epistolary novel, including the central role of Van Helsing, the victimization of Mina's friend Lucy, and the team of suitors fighting for Mina's hand and safety have all been abandoned. Though the consistent presence of a book advising the characters and prophesizing the outcome of their actions is a significant addition, little else is original at the level of the plot. Yet, the rights to adapt *Dracula* for the silver screen were never obtained by the creative team. The name "Dracula" was replaced by "Count Orlok," but advertisements still billed it as an adaptation of Stoker's novel. Stoker's widow, Florence, who received one of these ads from an anonymous source, sued them for all they were worth. The problem was that, by then, they were not worth much. *Nosferatu*, Prana Film Studio's first and only film, premiered in 1922 at the Berlin Zoological

Gardens and was followed by a party so lavish that it bankrupted the company and overshadowed the film itself. Not getting any funds from the plagiarists, Florence ensured that every copy of the film would be destroyed.

Clearly, she did not succeed, however, and the film has gone through several restorations to create the most watchable but historically accurate version of a century-old film. As of now, it is the earliest vampire and *Dracula* adaptation film that has survived. Because the only sound in the film is the orchestration, which did not survive in an original recording, it has been set to a number of different scores throughout the years. From all these different versions, it is clear that the very existence of this film today is one that, like the gothic tradition itself, borrows from every era in which it has drawn its audience while maintaining its roots in history. It's impossible to identify any one version that is "real". To borrow another iconic gothic text, *Nosferatu* is a Frankenstein of itself.

The version on which this essay is based was restored in 2005/2006 from a tinted nitrate print from 1922. It first premiered in America in 1929, which is the date listed on some versions. Some missing shots were retrieved from versions from the 1930s. Missing intertitles were restored from a 1960s version that was based on the 1922 version. The orchestration was based on the original score.

## SYNOPSIS

Like a play, *Nosferatu* is divided into five acts, with intertitles announcing both the ends and beginnings of each act.

*Act I* sets the scene: this will be the story of the 1838 "great death" in Wisborg and of *Nosferatu*, whose name should never be spoken. Thomas Hutter and his wife, Ellen, are a happy, carefree couple. Hutter works for a real estate agent, Knock, who is seen studying documents with mysterious occult-like symbols. He sends Hutter to meet their new client in Transylvania to offer him the house right across from his own. Hutter leaves Ellen with their friends, Harding and Ruth, and begins his travels. On the way, he is welcomed at a friendly inn, where the inhabitants advise him to stay the night because of werewolves. There, he discovers a book, *Of Vampyres Terrible Phantoms and the Seven Deadly Sins*, which he laughs at but will consult repeatedly throughout the rest of the film. When his carriage driver refuses to go the whole way to Count Orlok's castle, he is met by another mysterious carriage, which travels at supernatural speeds. Count Orlok meets him at the castle.

*Act II* introduces the dangerous Count Orlok in anticipation of his arrival to Germany. Hutter dines with the Count, who pours over more mysterious occult documents from Knock. When Hutter slips while cutting bread and draws blood, the Count leaps to suck it from the wound, convincing Hutter to stay up late with him. Hutter begins to have dark visions, and Count Orlok as *Nosferatu* begins visiting his room at night, leaving him with marks on his neck. At the same time, Ellen begins having nightmares and goes sleepwalking, reaching across the distance to interrupt *Nosferatu's* feeding. Hutter discovers *Nosferatu's* coffin and tries to escape. *Nosferatu* boards a ship via a coffin that doesn't hold him, and Hutter escapes out a window, injuring himself.

*Act III* follows *Nosferatu's* ocean voyage. While Hutter recovers in a hospital, the ship carrying *Nosferatu* and his coffins of dirt and rats sets sail, and Professor Bulwer is shown teaching about vampiric carnivorous plants in Wisborg. Meanwhile, Knock has fallen under *Nosferatu's* spell and is restrained in an insane asylum, where he senses his master's approach and eats flies and spiders. The ship suffers a horrible plague that leaves only the first mate and the captain alive. The first mate attacks the coffins with a hatchet, causing rats to pour out and *Nosferatu* to rise from his slumber. The sailor throws himself overboard, and the captain ties himself to the helm as *Nosferatu* takes over.

*Act IV* sees the arrival in Wisborg of *Nosferatu*, the plague, and Hutter. Knock escapes his cell. When the ship is discovered to carry plague, everyone is ordered to lock themselves in their homes, even with their dead, to prevent further spread.

*Act V* brings all the characters together. Nosferatu in his new home near the Hutter causes Ellen to have more visions and nightmares. Hutter tells her not to read the book about Nosferatu, but she finds it irresistible and learns that the only way to stop him is for an innocent maiden to sacrifice her blood and “maketh the vampire heed not the first crowing of the cock.” Everyone around her seems to be getting sick, and coffins fill the streets. Knock is identified as a possible cause and is hunted. Ellen senses Nosferatu, sees him out the window, and is weakened by his will. She sends Hutter to get Professor Bulwer. While he is gone, Nosferatu’s shadow creeps up the stairs and across her bed, and he begins drinking her blood, which distracts him from hearing the cock crow. He is caught in a window as the sun comes up, and he disappears in a puff of smoke. Knock mourns his death, Ellen dies in Hutter’s arms, and the “Great Death” ends.

## CHARACTERS

**Count Orlok** (Max Schreck): Nosferatu by night, a Transylvanian vampire who travels across the ocean to new lodgings in Germany, where he is drawn to Ellen

**Thomas Hutter** (Gustav von Wangenheim): A real estate employee who meets his client, Count Orlok, in Transylvania and falls under his spell. He is husband to Ellen and referred to merely as Hutter .

**Ellen Hutter** (Greta Schröder): The wife of Hutter. She is linked to Hutter and Nosferatu through visions and dreams and willingly sacrifices herself to defeat Nosferatu.

**Knock** (Alexander Granach): A real estate agent and the employer of Hutter. He falls under Nosferatu’s spell and goes mad.

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

### **COUNT ORLOK**

Nosferatu is the most surreal character of the film. In contrast to the overacting of the other characters, his movements are slow, restrained, or facilitated by speed-ramping, making them seem otherworldly. Where other characters gesture widely and accentuate their facial expressions, his arms and hands are often tucked tight to his chest or stiffly outstretched to accommodate his long claws. While his mouth rarely moves, his eyes stare wildly from his head, exuding a timeless intensity. Obviously playing the role of Dracula, Nosferatu comes from a foreign land of superstition to threaten the learned town of science, Wisborg, which can only interpret the impact of his powers through medical science, as a plague. Like Dracula’s, his power is psychological and sexual, preying on both minds and bodies in equal measure.

**Inhuman** Nosferatu is both supernatural and animalistic. The few instances when he poses as Count Orlok, the human, are awkward and clearly uncomfortable for him—this is a costume he wears only when he needs to. He is animalistic in his tendency to stare without emotion, demonstrating a keen sense of observation that goes beyond human ability. He is often surrounded by rats, taking on their movements and characteristics himself, particularly when it comes to his long claw-like fingers. While these scenes align him with the natural world, others make him seem unnatural and supernatural. Jerky camera movements and cinematic techniques that manipulate his movements into impossible movements situate him more in a dream than the natural world. There are several key moments when he moves across open spaces, which could leave him vulnerable but does not because his movements are so foreboding. For example, in the scene when he carries his own coffin from the ship to his new home, he seems to glide, the box posing no obstacle and requiring no effort on his part.

**Predator** Nosferatu is a much better predator than the rats to which he is repeatedly associated. He is frequently shown to stalk and successfully kill his prey. He often appears in Hutter’s room at night, the scene closing just as he begins his approach. The scene in which his shadow is shown to stalk up Ellen’s stairs to her room is famous in cinema history. He devotes these same predatory moves to minor characters as well. In one brief but telling scene on the ship, when a sailor is sick and delirious with what the captain believes is the plague, Nosferatu appears to him, clearly watching and stalking from atop his

stack of boxes. This is the first death, followed by all the other sailors until Nosferatu stands triumphant on the ship's deck.

### **THOMAS HUTTER**

A member of the well-off middle class, Hutter's sights are on earning the money to pursue domestic bliss with his wife, Ellen. He is hopeful, confident, and determined, placing full faith in the scientific and capitalist systems in which he participates. While he enjoys the revelry and kindness he discovers in Transylvania, he cannot take their beliefs seriously until he experiences them himself. After reading the book on Nosferatu and falling under his spell, he is tormented by dark visions. It is only when indisputable proof is presented to him, however, that he attempts to escape. By then it is too late. Hutter shows that the bright new future that Germany represents is not foolproof and can easily fall prey to past terrors. His efforts to protect Ellen in the second half of the film continually fail.

*Ambitious* Despite the happy scene with which the film begins, Hutter wants more. So that he can add luxury to his lifestyle, he works hard for his employer, Knock, and eagerly takes on new assignments that will improve his prospects. In an early scene that shows Hutter at work, Knock describes to him the desires of their new client, Count Orlok, and the "trouble, sweat, and blood" required to acquiesce to his request. A brief moment of doubt crosses Hutter's demeanor, but Knock's promise of "a good amount of money" returns him to his usual determinedly positive outlook. What's more, even his wife's clear concerns and sadness at his departure do not deter his determination to obtain this wealthy client, suggesting that his ambition outweighs even his love for Ellen.

*Naïve* Hutter's ambition makes him idealistic and naïve. His belief in pragmatism and his ability to achieve his goals with hard work blind him to negative possibilities encountered while in pursuit. Though he is repeatedly presented with warnings and evidence of danger, he laughs it off, determined to remain optimistic and open to the opportunities the universe presents him. While his increasing trepidation in scenes shared with Count Orlok suggests that he is beginning to suspect him of malicious intent, he is determined to present evidence to support such suspicions as mundane occurrences. Even later in the film, he is shown to be asleep at crucial moments when he should be protecting Ellen, unable to anticipate her danger. His naivete is exhibited in a scene in which he discovers marks on his neck while staying with Count Orlok. Rather than entertain any concern, he laughs it off in the same manner he laughed off warnings from townspeople in the pub. He writes in his letter to Ellen that he has been bitten by mosquitos in the night and that she should not worry about him.

### **ELLEN HUTTER**

Ellen is simultaneously the representation of innocence and the target of sexual desire in the film. From the first act, she thinks only of the wellbeing of others, from the small flowers her husband had killed to pick for her to the potential dangers he puts himself in for her sake. This selflessness gives her premonitions and leaves her vulnerable to outside influence. She is tormented by dreams that impact her physical safety, causing her to sleepwalk and making her susceptible to illness. While there is clearly affection shared between Ellen and Hutter, there is also sexual desire shared between Ellen and Nosferatu, though he takes on the role of aggressor in that relationship. With her willing sacrifice, she chooses to die after her innocence is taken from her through his penetrative bite. Like Mina Harker in Stoker's *Dracula*, Ellen represents the heart and soul of all those who know and love her.

*Sensitive* Ellen is sensitive in a number of ways. She empathizes not just with other humans but also with other living things. When Hutter brings her flowers, she expresses sadness because he killed them to present them to her. She is susceptible to nervousness, melancholy, and fear more than any other character. This sensitivity also takes the form of clairvoyance as she intuits when Hutter is in danger and sees him in her dreams. Whereas Knock falls prey to Nosferatu because of his stupidity and weakness, Ellen falls prey because her heightened sensitivity makes her both vulnerable and attractive to him. In one of the many scenes in which she is shown sensing danger, she sleepwalks out to the balcony. She has done this several times before when sensing that Hutter is in danger, but this time she senses

both Nosferatu approaching by ship and Hutter by carriage. When she shouts, "I must go to him. He's coming!!!" it is unclear whether she means her husband or the vampire.

**Selfless** Ellen's sensitivity leads her to be selfless since it indicates that she is fully aware of everything she does. Unlike anyone else, she knows what Count Orlok is before even meeting him (or at least meeting him in person). We see her selflessness most explicitly in the scene in which she reads Hutter's book on vampires, despite his warning that she should stay away from it. She is visibly affected as she reads about Nosferatu's victims and lingers on the page that reads, "Deliverance is possible by no other means but that an innocent maiden maketh the vampire heed not the first crowing of the cock, this done by the sacrifice of her own blood." She reads it again in a later scene, right before Nosferatu enters her psyche and her bedroom.

## THEMES

**Vampire tropes:** While *Nosferatu* certainly did not introduce the concept of the vampire or even establish most of the rules, it does generally participate in this tradition. Unlike the cinematic vampires that would come after him, Nosferatu is not an attractive, seductive force but rather an animalistic, almost alien creature who echoes the behaviors of the rats that surround him. He does not turn into any other creatures (bats, wolves, dogs, etc.) but rather seems confined to his humanoid form. Aside from these differences, he sleeps during the day and feeds at night, he sleeps in a coffin and carries coffins of dirt from his home with him, he feeds on blood by biting the necks of his victims, he has strong powers of psychic control, and he can move at strange speeds. While earlier texts showed that a vampire is weakened by the sun, *Nosferatu* introduces the idea that the sun can kill.

**Disease:** There is a strong presence of disease and illness throughout the film, starting with the framing narrative that calls the film's events "the Great Death in Wisborg." Disease plays two roles: to pose a natural explanation for a large number of casualties and to accentuate human mortality even in the face of scientific advancement. Because the audience witnesses the rats pouring out of the coffins with the arrival of Nosferatu, it is unclear whether the sudden deaths that pervade the town are actually caused by plague, by Nosferatu's feeding, or a combination of both. The description of symptoms that include marks on the neck imply a supernatural cause, but such descriptions would not have differed much from historical accounts of actual contagious spread. Interpreting Nosferatu's victims as plague victims gives the townspeople a familiar script to follow: they know to quarantine themselves in their homes, where it would be even easier for Nosferatu to reach them at night. The shift towards the need for a scapegoat implies the desire for human control and explanation rather than acceptance of the randomness of disease. Nosferatu's effect is interpreted as illness in other ways, as Ellen is diagnosed with blood congestion when she first falls under his spell.

**Dreams and Psychoanalysis:** While we never see the dreams experienced by Hutter or Ellen, we see their trance-like effects and the clear channels of communication they provide for the erotic love triangle of Ellen, Hutter, and Nosferatu. Accompanied by emphatic reaching and invasive shadows, the results appear nearly orgasmic. Sigmund Freud's theories of psychoanalysis and dream interpretation were already established and are on full display in this film. Through this lens, dreams might serve as unconscious wish-fulfillment for the dreamers, who, though they appear happy in their heteronormative married life, have secret taboo sexual desires. Dreams give them access to those desires, which are made conscious by Nosferatu's interference as he forces those psychological desires to manifest physically. Nosferatu's shadow, itself intangible like a dream, violates their bodies. The penetrative bite is just the culmination of this desire being fulfilled. These incidences, at least for a while, are interpreted as visions or dreams, particularly by Hutter, who has trouble acknowledging their danger.

**Antisemitism/Xenophobia:** Particularly considering its post-World-War I context and the anti-Jewish sentiment already held by the Nazi party in Germany during that time, the film is often read as specifically antisemitic and generally xenophobic. Nosferatu exhibits the caricature of Jewish stereotypes, including facial features and association with rats, which were used by the Nazis as a metaphor for the Jewish people. More broadly, the film depicts foreigners, specifically Romani peoples, as primitive and untrustworthy, referring to their land as "the land of phantoms and thieves." Though these criticisms were

undermined at the time by the inclusion of a large number of Jewish creative staff, including Alexander Granach, the film might arguably be said to foreshadow general pre-Holocaust discriminatory attitudes if not the prejudices of its director.

**Transgressed duality.** The film is full of distinctions, categories, and boundaries that make characters feel secure and content in the beginning but that introduce horror as they are transgressed one by one. Such transgressions reveal the artificiality of those borders to begin with and the extent to which their safety is a delusion. These are signaled stylistically with elements like film negatives, mirrors, and windows. What's more, while transgression is facilitated by the monstrous figure of Nosferatu, the actual transgressions must involve human participation, showing characters that they're capable of taboo or unsettling acts.

Transgressed dualities include:

**Life/Death:** The most obvious is Nosferatu's pursuit of eternal life by consuming the lives of others, leaving a trail of death. Though he does not resurrect any character to make them a fellow vampire as Dracula does, he uses trances to replicate a space between life and death.

**Visions/Reality:** All the characters who fall under Nosferatu's spell suffer from visions that manifest in reality. Hutter shrugs them off as inconsequential for most of the film, Ellen recognizes their danger but is paralyzed with fear, and Knock embraces them as he crosses from sanity to insanity.

**Superstition/Science:** Throughout the film, characters gravitate towards superstition or science to guide their behavior and to process evidence of what's happening around them. Though most of the main characters dismiss superstition as foolish, they are ultimately shown to be the fools as their scientific interpretations are proven wrong time and again. Only Professor Bulwer seems capable of combining these two approaches in a productive way, but it does not impact the course of the narrative.

**Sexuality/Innocence:** Both Hutter and Ellen are presented as happy in their innocence at the start of the film, loving one another but not shown to pursue erotic desire beyond affectionate kissing. Nosferatu comes to them in their bedrooms, and his shadow slowly creeps across their bodies. Their reactions, though clearly of horror, are also of ecstasy, introducing potential narratives of sexual violence, queer sexuality, or psychoanalysis. Hutter is passive during these moments, but Ellen participates, touching her own body in anticipation of the shadow that will soon cross her. The book on vampires prophesizes that Nosferatu will be defeated by the sacrifice of an innocent maiden's blood. It might also prophesize the sacrifice of the maiden's innocence. This has been a vampire trope since Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) and continues in vampire narratives today.

**Self/Other:** As Nosferatu's psychic hold tightens on his victims, their behavior takes on monstrous qualities, implying that they themselves might become the monster they fear. This occurs most clearly with Knock, who completely crosses over to Otherness. The assumed presence of contagion also points out the need to villainize the sick, who might spread their disease, making the healthy unhealthy and dangerous like themselves. As one of the intertitles notes, fear in Wisborg was of disease, not of monsters: "Who was still healthy? Who was sick?"

## SCENES

**Loving Couple:** Set to cheerful music, the first scene shows Hutter and Ellen in their separate spaces, playing with a cat, getting dressed, picking flowers, and doing daily chores. They come together when Hutter brings Ellen flowers, which does make her sad because he had to kill them.



**The Book:** After being convinced by the townspeople not to travel to his client Count Orlok's castle that night to avoid werewolves, Hutter settles into his comfortable lodgings. He finds a book titled *Of Vampyres Terrible Phantoms and the Seven Deadly Sins*. He reads about the vampire Nosferatu, who feeds on blood and lives in such places as tombs and coffins full of dirt from "the fields of the Black Death." Though Hutter is drawn to the book, he scoffs and flings it aside.



**Meeting Nosferatu:** After being expelled from his carriage and told that the driver would take him no further, Hutter is met on the side of the road by another carriage, driven by a strange-looking man. He becomes alarmed as the carriage starts traveling at unnaturally high speeds and goes through a magical transformation, indicated by a film negative effect. When they arrive, Hutter is badly shaken. As he approaches the castle, the doors open on their own, and he steps through. A tall, thin, stern looking man greets him in the courtyard, clasping his hands and scowling. He has been kept waiting too long. He leads Hutter into the darkness of the castle. This ends Act I.



**Precious Blood:** Hutter dines while Count Orlok sits at the table with him, pouring over the mysterious documents that Hutter and his employer gave him. A skeleton clock chimes, frightening Hutter just as he is cutting a slice of bread. He slips and cuts his thumb, which starts to bleed. Hutter laughs it off, but Orlok jumps to his feet and exclaims, "You've hurt yourself... the precious blood!" He grabs his hand and starts sucking at the wound. Hutter backs off slowly, but Orlok follows and insists that they stay up later together because it is not yet sunrise and he sleeps during the day "completely dead to the world." Terrified, Hutter sits as Orlok approaches him and the scene fades to black.





**Nightmares and Shadows:** Staying with friends Harding and Ruth, Ellen sits up in bed from a peaceful sleep, eyes wide. She tiptoes across her bedroom while Harding sits smoking a pipe in the next room. She wanders out to the balcony and onto the railing, moving across it slowly with her arms outstretched. Harding hears her and rushes to catch her just as she faints and falls. He calls for a doctor. The scene cuts to an image of Hutter huddled and frightened in a corner as a shadow with outstretched arms creeps across his body, before returning to Ellen sitting up in bed with alarm once again, the doctor now by her side. Wide-eyed, she reaches her arms out and screams, "Hutter!" The scene returns to show Hutter, now lying flat and motionless as the shadow recedes back across his body. The Count straightens up and looks right over his shoulder as the scene cuts back to Ellen, arms still outstretched, staring left, as though back at him across the scenes. The Count slowly exits the room, the door closing by itself behind him. Ellen relaxes, clearly exhausted, and is diagnosed with "just a mild case of blood congestion."



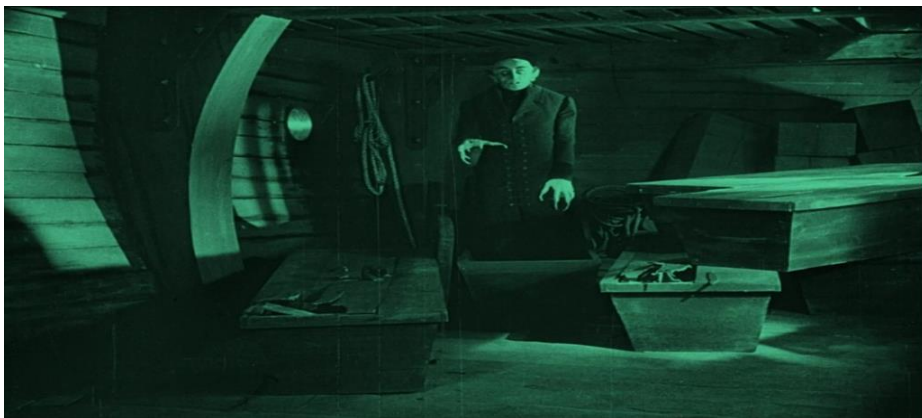
**Blood is Life:** Professor Bulwer is teaching a small group of students about carnivorous plants. He demonstrates with a Venus Flytrap, which slowly traps a fly in its grasp. "Like a vampire, no?" he asks. The scene is interrupted by an intertitle that explains that Knock, the real estate agent, is under Nosferatu's spell. The scene cuts to an asylum, where an orderly fetches a doctor out of concern for a new patient's sanity. The new patient is Knock, who is sitting, dejected, in a dismal cell. When they come in, he starts laughing hysterically, swatting at the air and eating the flies he catches. "Blood is life! Blood is life!" he says, as the staff look on, perplexed and disgusted. He attacks them but is thrown back. The scene cuts to the professor, continuing his lesson now with "a polyp with tentacles." The scene returns to Knock, who points to spiders catching insects in their web as he is being restrained.



**Nosferatu Sees Ellen's Picture:** While Hutter is showing Count Orlok some paperwork, a miniature of Ellen falls out of his bag. The Count sees it and is entranced, snatching it up and exclaiming, "Your wife has a lovely neck...". Hutter, horrified, snatches it back and puts it in his coat. It is then that Count Orlok announces that he's buying the house across from Hutter's and signs the paperwork. Hutter quickly gathers the papers, visibly upset.



**Crossing the Ocean:** Aboard a ship in the middle of the sea, a sailor rushes to the captain's cabin to inform him of illness below deck. He arrives to find the sick man delirious and afraid. They give him a drink and leave. While they're gone, he sees a transparent Count Orlok perched on his coffins of dirt, but then he disappears. The man is terrified. An intertitle reads that "it" (the plague/Nosferatu) spreads throughout the ship until only the captain and first mate are left. We see them tossing the bodies overboard, covered in sheets and weighted down. The first mate grabs a hatchet and announces he is going below. He starts hacking at Nosferatu's boxes, and rats come pouring out. The lid opens on one of them, and Nosferatu levitates to his feet. The sailor flees and throws himself overboard while the captain watches. The captain ties himself to the helm with rope. Nosferatu is now on deck. The captain stares offscreen at something approaching him. The scene ends with an intertitle that reads: "The death ship had a new captain."



**Ellen's Sacrifice:** Nosferatu stares out his window, clutching the bars. The scene cuts to Ellen sleeping peacefully until she sits up, terrified and seeming to sense him. She clutches her breast, under his influence. Hutter is asleep in a chair in her room but does not stir. She goes to the window, struggling to maintain control. She appeals to Hutter, but he remains asleep. Nosferatu raises his arms as his influence strengthens. She throws open the window as he slowly moves away from his own. He throws open his door as Ellen finally wakes Hutter and tells him to get the professor before collapsing in bed. As he goes, she again walks to the window, but Nosferatu is gone. The scene cuts to his shadow creeping up the stairs towards her room. She again clasps her breast and returns to bed as the shadow creeps over her body towards and across her body. The scene cuts away quickly to show Hutter rousing the professor, and cuts back to show Nosferatu crouched down by Ellen's neck, drinking. The cock crows, and Nosferatu slowly raises his head. Knock is also woken in his cell, and the professor is on his way. Nosferatu now clutches his own breast in the same place and, walking in front of the window and into the sunlight, disappears into a puff of smoke.



## CINEMATIC NARRATION

*Nosferatu* participates in several cinematic traditions. The first is obviously the silent film tradition, characterized by what we might call “overacting”: pantomime-style gestures, exaggerated facial expressions, and repeated motions. Scenes are short and are focused through vignette framing, which also aids in easy and frequent transitions. Because of the lack of audible speaking, scenes are interrupted by intertitles that provide narration, dialogue, and documents. Interestingly, the intertitles are presented in the first person, an unknown recipient of the tale who knows more than its characters and imparts that knowledge to the audience. It is suggested that the narrator heard this story directly from Professor Bulwar, one of the minor characters involved. Though the film is referred to as black-and-white, its plates are actually tinted in different colors to distinguish between scenes and settings.



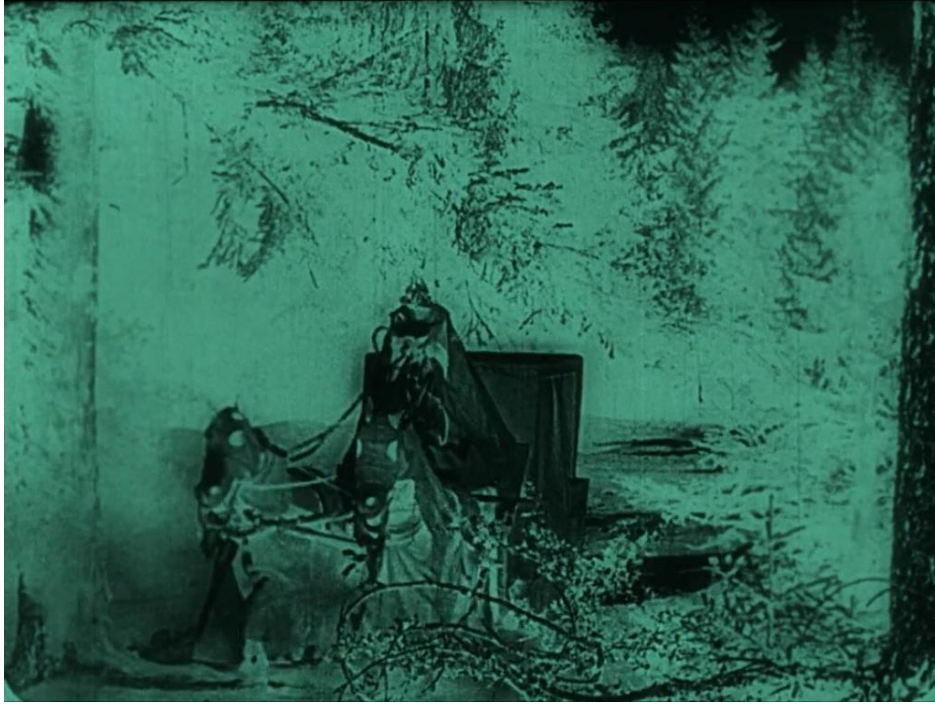
*An example of the circular vignette, often accentuated by doorframes, arches, windows, and other framing devices.*

*Nosferatu* is also an example of cinematic German Expressionism, following the success of German Expressionist film, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, two years earlier. This style is characterized by the visual distortion of setting and movement to create an unstable mood, the prominence of emotion and delusion over reality, frequent asymmetrical camera angles, and the themes of madness and lost identity. It was impacted by the devastation of the war and an increase in fear/anxiety amidst economic, political, and social instability.

German Expression often includes surrealist or impossible sets. *Nosferatu* is subtle in this regard, as it takes advantage of natural outdoor settings and lavish homes, mostly bedrooms. It relies more on fantasy and superstition than artificiality to create a sense of disruption. Its surrealism appears in makeup and costume, turning Count Orlok himself into a surreal character, one who also engages in surrealist impossible movements, inhuman jerky speeds, seeming to float or levitate. This effect is achieved through early stop action animation and speed-ramping. These effects are also used for a carriage that moves without its wheels turning and doors that open on their own, as if by magic. The journey taken by the carriage is also made uncanny through the use of film negative effects, creating a duality that echoes the one created through shadows and windows, which are used to produce visually disorienting instances in which characters look across at, down on, or up at each other. Instead of unexpected angles in the architecture, *Nosferatu* utilizes unexpected camera angles. Count Orlok in particular is shown through extreme low-angle shots that have become renowned in cinematic study, as well as a mix of wide-angle and close-up shots that create anticipation and anxiety.



*Stop motion animation was used to make this door open by itself, a demonstration of Nosferatu's power.*



*The film negative effect that signals a supernatural, dreamlike spaces.*



*An extreme low angle shot, indicating that Nosferatu is now in control of the ship.*

German Expression also involves shadows, something that Nosferatu revolutionizes and employs to cross the divide between dreams and reality, visions and sensations, the natural and supernatural, and purity and impurity. This uncertainty is complicated by the persistence of chiaroscuro or extremes of light and dark that both exposes while also concealing, creating vulnerability of the known and danger of the unknown at the same time. Characters reach each other before they are in close proximity through creeping shadows that develop a movement, violence, and violation of their own. These elements contribute to the disorienting sense that nothing seems stable or real, dreams so frequently becoming reality across time and space.



*The irresistible shadows that can transgress boundaries physical form cannot.*