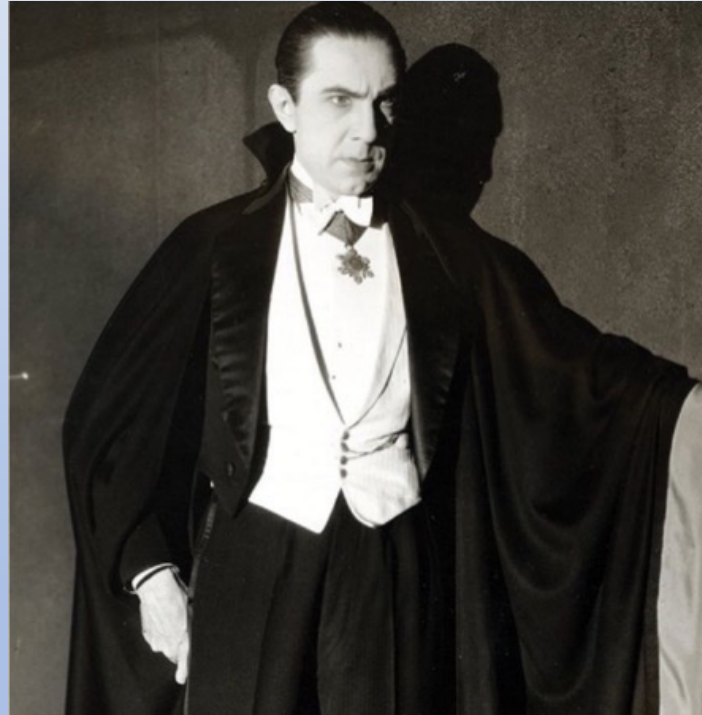


Dracula

Simply a great horror story...or antisemitic?

SinaiFree Film Society
November 30, 2022

Discussion



Bela Lugosi as Dracula (1931). Directed by Tod Browning.
Cinematography by Karl Freund

Sinai Free Synagogue
550 North Columbus Avenue
Mount Vernon, N.Y. 10552
<https://sinaifreesynagogue.org/>

Is Dracula antisemitic?

Some possible stereotypes/allusions in the book? the film?

- **Need for human blood: associated with**
 - the blood libel: killing Christian children/using their blood to make matzoh and for other rituals (a conspiracy theory directed against “the Jews” as a group)
 - venereal and other diseases (“bad blood”)
- **Characteristics**
 - physical: “aquiline” face (description in the novel)
 - avarice: love of money
 - aversion to the Cross. Or does the Cross just remind Dracula of his weakness (i.e., his fear of death, while Jesus was not afraid to die)?
- **Parasite:** adapting to the host community (i.e., acculturating) in order to undermine from within (Dracula comes to London from the East)
- **“Invasion”:** Jews immigrating to London from Eastern Europe seen as “metaphorical vampires” who drained the economy; endangered public health; threatened English culture, morals, hegemony

Who is Dracula based on?

Some possible origins

- Jewish:
 - Melmoth the Wanderer, by C.R. Maturin. Based on the biblical Wandering Jew. The novel's title character sells his soul to the devil
 - Svengali (evil mesmerist in Trilby, 1894 novel by George du Maurier. Svengali is Jewish)
- Non-Jewish
 - Vlad the Impaler (15th century Wallachian warlord)
 - Sir Henry Irving (great 19th century British actor and theatrical manager; also Bram Stoker's employer)
 - Celtic mythology (Bram Stoker was Irish)

Vlad the Impaler



Svengali



George du Maurier, 1894

Sir Henry Irving



Vampires: antisemitic imagery

“The end is not only the end of the freedom of the peoples oppressed by the Jew, but also the end of this parasite upon the nations. After the death of his victim, the vampire sooner or later dies too.” [pp. 293-296]

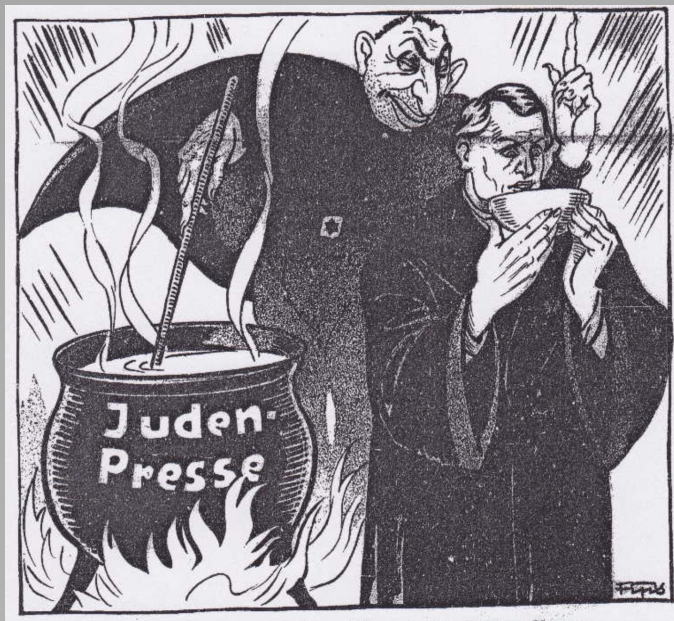
Hitler, *Mein Kampf (My Struggle)*, Houghton Mifflin, New York: Hutchinson Publ. Ltd., London, 1969

Source: Yad Vashem

“Faust and Mephisto”

Der Stürmer, July 1932

The devil is preparing his potion in a cauldron entitled “Jewish Press”



Source: German Propaganda Archive, Calvin University

“Sharoncula”

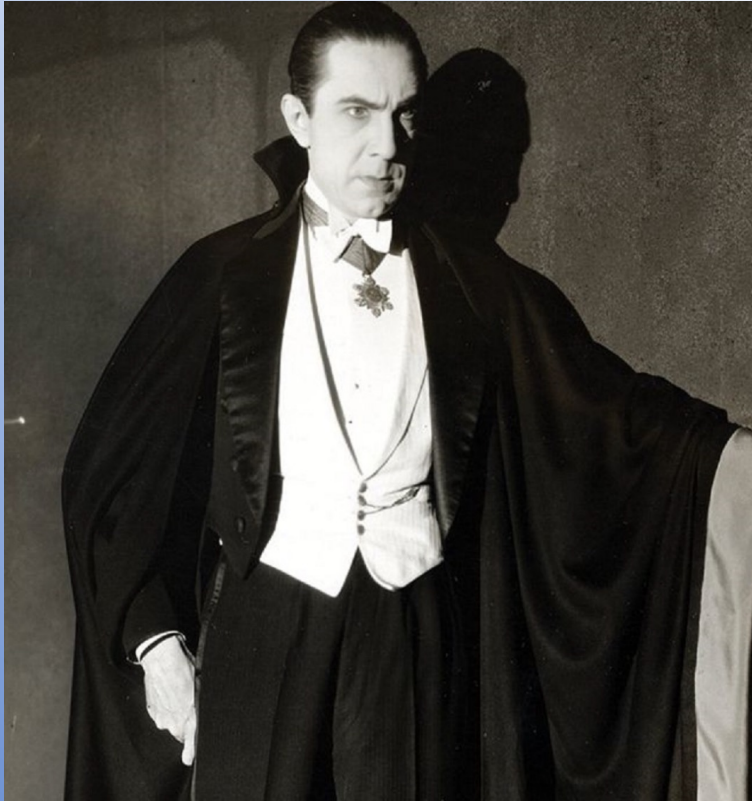
Saudi English language daily, 2001



Saudi English language daily depicts Prime Minister Ariel Sharon as Dracula biting into a Palestinian child on a movie screen in “Sharoncula.” arabnews.com (December 2001).

Source: The Nazi Roots of Middle Eastern Anti-Semitism. StandWithUs

Dracula's medallion



Bela Lugosi as Dracula (1931).
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Does it represent a

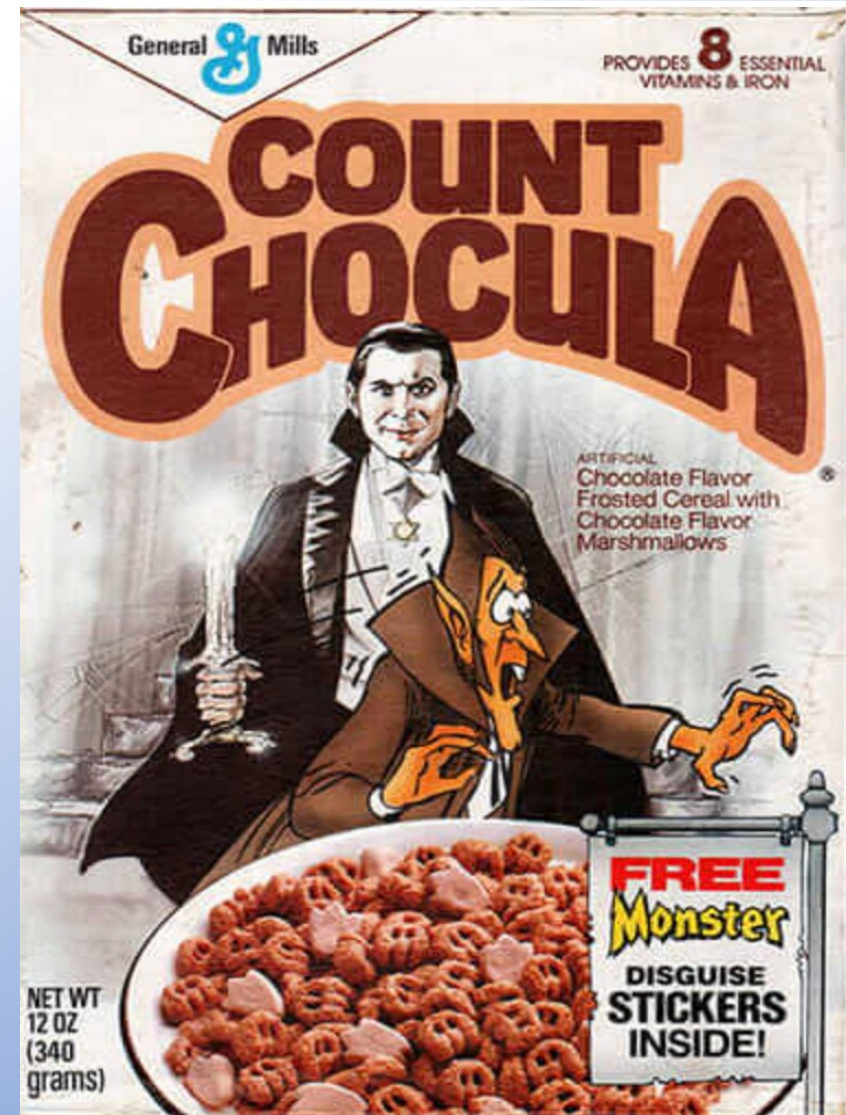
- Star of David?
- hexagram symbolizing
 - a union of opposites, as in other religious traditions, the occult, alchemy?
 - evil (the devil's number), as in witchcraft?
- neck order once worn by aristocrats in formal attire?



Dracula's medallion (replica)

Count Chocula cereal

- 1971: created by General Mills
- 1987:
 - box redesigned to feature an image of Bela Lugosi from the 1931 film
 - medallion appears to be a Star of David
- Responding to protests, GM apologized and removed the medallion

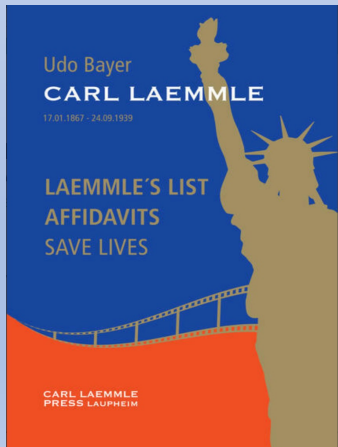


Source: Cereal Guru

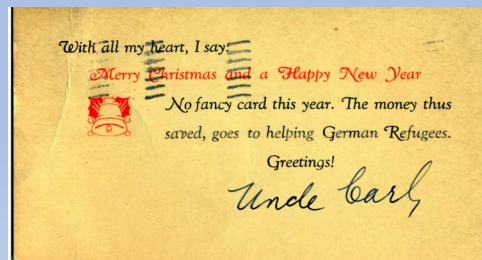
Carl Laemmle (1867-1939)

Known as “Uncle Carl”

- Born in Laupheim, Germany; came to the U.S. (1884); Jewish
- 1912: Founded Universal (first major Hollywood studio), which produced and released Dracula and other classic horror films of the '20s and '30s
- 1932-1939: Enabled 300 families (1000+ people) – relatives and nonrelatives – to flee Germany and find refuge in the U.S. by providing affidavits of financial support, jobs, and other assistance
- *He is the closest thing to an Oskar Schindler or Raoul Wallenberg that Hollywood has* (Thomas Doherty, historian and author of Hollywood and Hitler, 1933-1939)



Laemmle's List. He anticipated the Nazi disaster even before Hitler rose to power

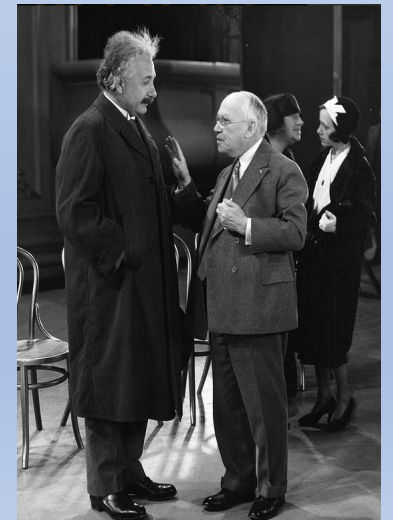
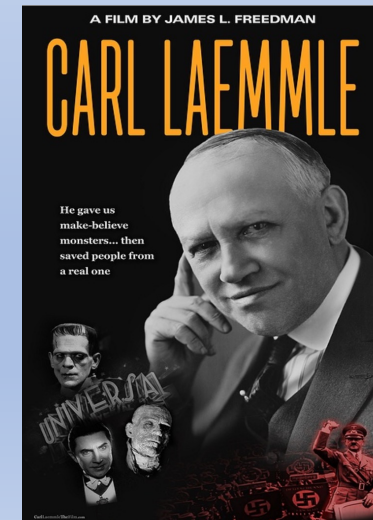


A Laemmle holiday card noting Jews' plight. Collection of Rosemary Hill

Source: New York Times

Far right. Albert Einstein and Carl Laemmle, Jan. 11, 1931

“He gave us make-believe monsters... then saved people from a real one”



Carl Laemmle

Letter to William Wyler: October 6, 1938

Born to a Jewish family in the German Empire, William Wyler (1902-1981) became one of Hollywood's greatest directors. He, too, was involved in the rescue of German Jews. Wyler joined the Air Force in 1942, filmed a 1944 documentary about the 25th bombing mission of the B-17 "Flying Fortress" known as the Memphis Belle (at great personal risk), and directed two acclaimed films of World War II: Mrs. Miniver (1942) and The Best Years of Our Lives (1947). Each won several Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Director.

Dear Mr. Wyler: I want to ask you a very big favor. The Jewish situation in Germany has been getting on my nerves for a long, long time. I feel that these poor, unfortunate people need help the worst way. I have been over there recently and know what they are going through. I have issued so many personal affidavits that the United States government won't accept any more from me except for my closest blood-relatives. Nevertheless, while I was over there, I was worried so much by the distressed people that I promised about 150 of them I would move heaven and earth to find sponsors for them. And that's why I am writing you this letter.

Source: Carl Laemmle to William Wyler, October 6, 1938. [William Wyler Collection](#), File 633: Immigration. Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

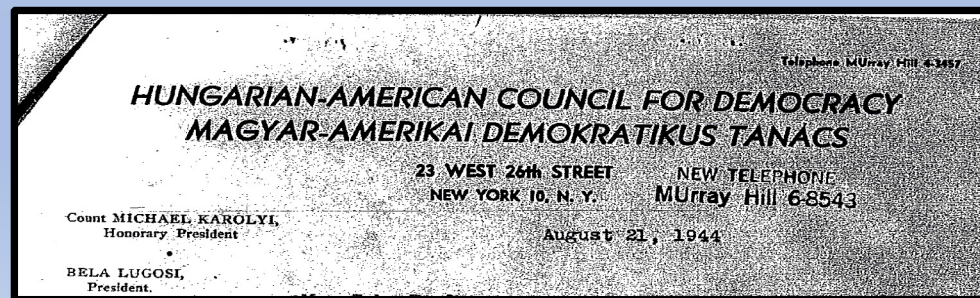
Telegraph to FDR: May 1939

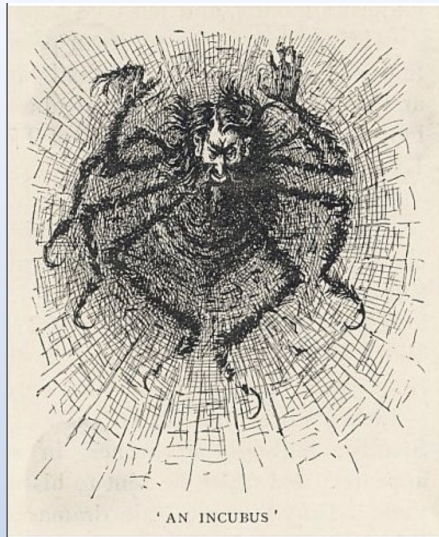
Pleading on behalf of the Jewish refugees who sailed from Europe to Cuba aboard the St. Louis and were turned away, Laemmle wrote to Roosevelt: *[I appeal to you](#) to use your influence with [Cuban strongman Fulgencio] Batista, or someone else to take in these wandering, worthy and inoffensive people, and may God bless you forever as exponents of the Golden rule.*

Nothing was done, and the St. Louis was forced to return to Europe.

Bela Lugosi (1882-1956)

- Born in Hungary; fled because of his political activism (1919); came to the U.S. (1920); Roman Catholic
- Originated the role of Dracula in a Broadway play by John Balderston (1927). The 1931 film is also based the play
- As president of the Hungarian-American Council for Democracy,
 - contacted the War Refugee Board in August 1944, trying to identify and assist 320 Hungarian Jews who had escaped to Basle (following Germany's invasion of Hungary in March 1944)
 - addressed over 2000 people at an HACD-sponsored rally (August 28, 1944)
- Was part of a larger campaign urging U.S. intervention in Hungary and a loosening of immigration restrictions (at a time when few people spoke out)
- Later able to pressure Hungary to stop the deportations (by then it was too late for most of the country's Jews)





George du Maurier, 1894

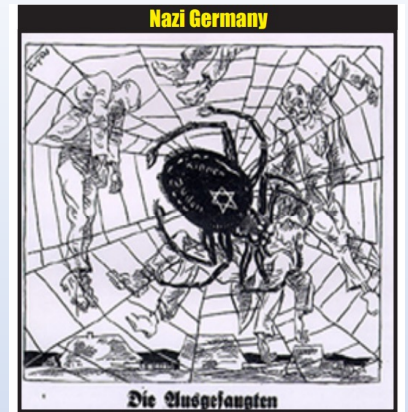
Mixed metaphors: spiders and vampires

Svengali

Nazi image. Spiders do not drink the blood of their prey

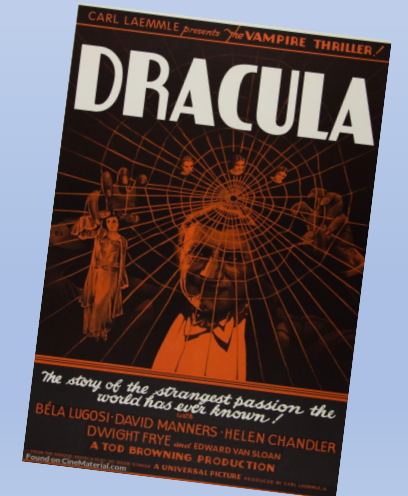
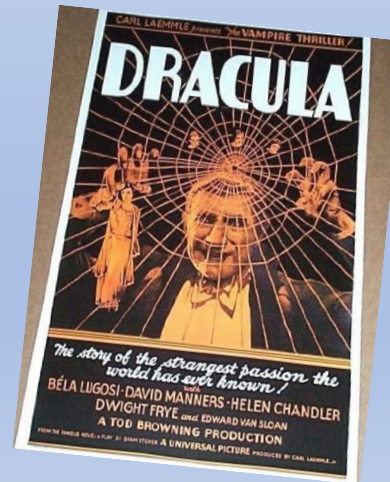
Victims caught in Dracula's 'web'

Dracula was produced at Universal by the founder's son, Carl Laemmle Jr. The cinematographer, Karl Freund, was also Jewish. Therefore, it is unlikely that the film or its publicity suggests any antisemitism.



A spider, identified with a Jewish star, drinks the blood of his Aryan victims. *Der Stürmer* (1930). From the German Propaganda Archive. Courtesy: Randall Bytwerk.

Source: The Nazi Roots of Middle Eastern Anti-Semitism. StandWithUs



Dracula

Simply a great horror story...

- Stoker “took no vain view of his efforts as an author...He wrote his books to sell.”

Hall Caine, Stoker’s friend, and the novel’s dedicatee

- “In the final analysis, the most frightening thing about Dracula is the strong probability that it meant far less to Bram Stoker than it has come to mean to us.”

David J. Skal, *Something in the Blood: The Untold Story of Bram Stoker, the Man Who Wrote Dracula*. Also the author of *Hollywood Gothic: The Tangled Web of Dracula from Novel to Stage to Screen*

- “...the current fashion for spotting unspoken references to Jews throughout Dracula may likewise fade with time, unless it turns out to be as immortal as the vampire himself.”

Benjamin Ivry, “[125 Years Later](#), Is Dracula Antisemitic — Or Is He Just Another Vampire?” *Forward* (May 23, 2022)

or antisemitic?

- Dracula, “with his peculiar physique, his parasitical desires, his aversion to the cross and to all the trappings of Christianity, his blood-sucking attacks, and his avaricious relation to money, resembled stereotypical anti-Semitic nineteenth representations of the Jew.”

Judith Halberstam, “Technologies of Monstrosity: Bram Stoker’s Dracula.” *Victorian Studies* 36:3 (Spring, 1993)

- “As rendered by Bram Stoker, the literary depiction of Count Dracula is deeply antisemitic, with roots in the long-standing blood libel against Jews and the antisemitic archetype of the wealth-hoarding degenerate.”

Rob Silverman-Ascher, “The Antisemitic History of Vampires.” [heyalma](#) (October 26, 2021)

- “Count Dracula is an outsider...specifically an immigrant from Eastern Europe just when large numbers of Eastern European Jews were arriving on England’s shores...Jews were not only viewed as competitors, but as parasites, metaphorical vampires who lived by draining away economic opportunities rather than blood.”

Sara Libby Robinson, “[Blood Will Tell](#): Anti-Semitism and Vampires in British Popular Culture, 1875–1914.” *Golem* 3:1 (2009)

Relevance today

The more things change, the more they stay the same...

Populism:

- Conspiracy theories that target specific groups
- Emotional appeals
 - Stereotypes
 - Scapegoating to address grievances (e.g., loss of jobs)
 - Fear of social change
 - Fear of the outsider: immigrants (“invaders”) will
 - ❑ deprive “native citizens” of economic opportunities
 - ❑ replace the white majority (“replacement theory”)
 - ❑ increase crime/imperil public health
 - ❑ undermine traditional ways of life
 - ❑ precipitate “reverse colonization”: the colonizers will become the colonized
- Accusations of divided loyalty (placing allegiance to a group over the national interest)