The biggest shock in *Bram Stoker's Dracula* isn't a clever plot twist or a jarringly horrific scene. It's that director Francis Ford Coppola has crafted such an unusual and unconventional film.

Coppola has been fairly frank in stating that his primary goal with *Dracula* is to gross enough money to finance *The Case,* a movie about AIDS which he obviously feels to be far more important. But rather than make a "safe" movie, merely illustrating Bram Stoker's novel and allowing the interest drama and terror in that story to work for guaranteed effects, he uses a frenetic pace and ubiquitous visual tricks in a style that is closer to that of MTV music videos than to gothic horror. This turns out to be *Dracula's* curse as well as its blessing. The movie's appearance dominates its plot and narrative so much that most of the film is reducing results that seem "new" to an audience that has grown accustomed to the more realistic effects of computer generated work seen in films such as *Terminator 2.* Some of these stylish shots, particularly those that pile layers of imagery upon one another in rapid succession, have a magnificent effect. Others, such as those of Dracula and Mina dancing among a myriad of candles, seem recycled out of old music videos.

A bit of the film's visual excellence is used to suggest certain themes. In one scene in which Dracula is beginning to seduce Mina, an image of champagne bubbles is graphically matched to one of red blood corpuscles. In another, a wolf-like form of Dracula begins breathing heavily upon seeing the target of his obsession, his fluorescent vaseline body. Such effects, sets, and costumes are so vivid and extravagant that *Dracula* manages to be engrossing even as it frustrates with a lack of coherence and sense.

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* begins with a prologue describing the exploits of Prince Vlad the Impaler, a 15th-century Romanian king whom Stoker based his lead character upon. Vlad/Dracula (Gary Oldman) leaves his wife, Elisabeta (Winona Ryder), to fight in the name of the Christian church against Turkish infidels invading Europe. On a darkened battlefield, he swears that he will live an eternal life under a crimson sky, a silhouetted Dracula is seen piercing the bodies of his foes with a spear before swinging their bodies wildly in the air in a wondrously realized scene. Angered by the success of the war, the Turks shoot into the castle as an arrow bearing a note falsely proclaiming the king's death. Elisabeta reads the letter, is overtaken by grief, and throws herself out the window to the moat far below.

When Dracula returns home to discover that his wife is dead and, according to the clergy, damned from salvation because of her suicidal sin, he swears that he will live an eternal life of vengeance on the God and society who have betrayed his loyalty. Centuries later, the ambitious young Jonathan Harker (Keanu Reeves) is sent to the Transylvanian castle of Count Dracula by his London-based company. After arriving at the home of Dracula, now a weak and decrepit man with two large mounds of white hair growing above his shiny face, Harker begins to realize that Dracula is not a typical client. Soon, the old man catches sight of a photograph of Harker's fiancee, Mina Murray (Ryder). Believing Mina to be a reincarnation of his Elisabeta, Dracula traps Harker in his castle and begins to plan a journey to London to reclaim his long-lost love.

The plot of *Bram Stoker's Dracula* is clarity of minor importance. However, to the makers of this film, the true emphasis lies on the astounding onslaught of imaginative and over-the-top visuals that are truly unlike anything seen in any other recent movie. In making *Dracula,* Coppola made a decision to rely on visual and primative effects in an attempt to create a mythical and magical tone. Forced perspective miniatures, double exposures, mirrors, and low-quality filters used to produce results that seem "new" to an audience that has grown accustomed to image manipulation seen in films such as *Terminator 2.* Some of these shots, particularly those that pile layers of images upon one another in rapid succession, have a magnificent effect. Others, such as those of Dracula and Mina dancing among a myriad of candles, seem recycled out of old music videos.

Amazingly, Coppola has said that he intended the look of his movie to be small and unobtrusive compared to the attention commanded by his cast. It may be a fortunate thing that he never followed through on this desire, because the acting in this picture deserves very little attention of its own. Oldman and Ryder give the only two truly good performances in the film—those in which Dracula is beginning to seduce Mina, which ONLY they appear come closest to being good. Many others, such as those of Harker and Mina dancing among a myriad of candles, seem recycled out of old music videos. The true emphasis lies on the astounding onslaught of imaginative and over-the-top visuals that are truly unlike anything seen in any other recent movie. In making *Dracula,* Coppola made a decision to rely on visual and primative effects in an attempt to create a mythical and magical tone. Forced perspective miniatures, double exposures, mirrors, and low-quality filters used to produce results that seem "new" to an audience that has grown accustomed to image manipulation seen in films such as *Terminator 2.* Some of these shots, particularly those that pile layers of images upon one another in rapid succession, have a magnificent effect. Others, such as those of Dracula and Mina dancing among a myriad of candles, seem recycled out of old music videos.