Reviews of Dreyer's VAMPYR [taken from the amazon.com web page for the movie; remember that for the most part these reviewers are not scholars]

Editorial Reviews

Amazon.com
In this chilling, atmospheric German film from 1932, director Carl Theodor Dreyer favors style over story, offering a minimal plot that draws only partially from established vampire folklore. Instead, Dreyer emphasizes an utterly dreamlike visual approach, using trick photography (double exposures, etc.) and a fog-like effect created by allowing additional light to leak onto the exposed film. The result is an unsettling film that seems to spring literally from the subconscious, freely adapted from the Victorian short story Carmilla by noted horror author Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, about a young man who discovers the presence of a female vampire in a mysterious European castle. There's more to the story, of course, but it's the ghostly, otherworldly tone of the film that lingers powerfully in the memory. Dreyer maintains this eerie mood by suggesting horror and impending doom as opposed to any overt displays of terrifying imagery. Watching Vampyr is like being placed under a hypnotic trance, where the rules of everyday reality no longer apply. As a splendid bonus, the DVD includes The Mascot, a delightful 26-minute animated film from 1934. Created by pioneering animator Wladyslaw Starewicz, this clever film—in which a menagerie of toys and dolls springs to life—serves as an impressive precursor to the popular Wallace & Gromit films of the 1990s. --Jeff Shannon

Product Description:
Carl Theodor Dreyer's eerie horror classic stars Julian West as a visitor to a remote inn under the spell of an aged, bloodthirsty female vampire. Extremely atmospheric, this rare gem delivers a decided chill.

Customer Reviews

Haunting Tale of Life and Death & Incredible Early Animation, January 13, 2004
Reviewer: mirasreviews (McLean, VA USA)

In a small French town, a man named Allen Gray (Julian West) takes a room at an inn. His sleep is interrupted when a strange man (Maurice Shutz) comes into his room speaking incoherently about death. The man leaves a small package with instructions that it should be opened upon his death and departs. Allen gets out of bed and prowls around the inn in search of an explanation, eventually wandering onto a nearby estate where he finds the mysterious man who was in his room living with his two daughters. One of his daughters has been bitten by a vampire, and the house is shrouded in death.

"Vampyr" was written by director Carl Theodor Dreyer, who was inspired by the Victorian supernatural tales "In a Glass Darkly" by Seridan Le Fanu. The film has a semi-coherent narrative, but it is primarily an abstract meditation on Death. Dialogue is sparse, in German, sometimes muffled, and not consistently subtitled. The story is also told with text that is displayed between scenes. But it is the film's cinematography and score that do the most to communicate "Vampyr"'s sense of mystery, foreboding, and helplessness. Rudolph Maté's cinematography is truly astounding. I was most struck by the way that the camera just kind of lurks, mimicking Allen's activity as he explores the inn. And Maté created some truly effective visual effects in spite of 1932's primitive technology. Wolfgang Zeller's score provides most of the film's audio track and reveals more about the characters' feelings than the sparse dialogue does. "Vampyr" won't appeal to those who prefer a strong narrative. It is often abstract. "Vampyr" concerns what goes on in the hearts and minds of characters facing circumstances beyond their control and understanding -- facing death itself, and these things are not explicitly communicated. Carl Dreyer's direction and Rudolph Maté's
cinematography are terrifically creative. Recommended if you like abstract tales of death or admire extraordinary early cinematography.

**Strange Shadows**, November 7, 2005  
**Reviewer:** Jeremy W. Forstadt (Phoenix, AZ)

Danish director Carl Theodor Dreyer, who is renowned for his extremely important masterpiece THE PASSION OF JOAN OF ARC (1928), created one of the most stylish horror films ever made when he filmed VAMPYR - DER TRAUM DES ALLAN GREY in 1931. It is loosely based on the Carmilla vampire novella by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu.

Stylistically, VAMPYR is a silent movie: the dialogue is extremely sparse and even less of it is subtitled. The imagery in this movie is astounding, despite the fact that this movie is in very poor shape and in bad need of restoration. It is one of the eeriest movies I have ever seen, and the imagery of light and shadow in particular give this film a nightmarish quality.

Julian West plays the young man David (or Allan) Grey who checks into an inn only to be disturbed by a mysterious old man who hands him a package only to be opened in the event of his death. Led by a series of strange shadows (animation?), Grey eventually winds his way onto the old man's estate where he keeps two daughters, one of whom may have been bitten by a vampire (because she has "Crazy Eyes"), and the other, played by Sybille Schmitz, who I happen to find extremely appealing.

The poor quality of the print actually adds to the nightmarish effect of this film. This is a great movie to see very late at night, when the neighborhood is quiet, and nobody else is at home.

**dreampyr**, March 16, 2004  
**Reviewer:** Yoon Min Cho (chicago, IL USA)

What's truly unnerving about Vampyr is it's not so much about monsters as psychic monstrosity. Most movies objectify our fears and horrors, materializing them into goblins, slashers, vampires, and whatnot. In Vampyr, we are to forced to confront our state of mind, our fears as they surface and take shape, then dissolve, then return to haunt us yet again.

In most vampire movies, dracula is a frightening creature, a prince of the dead. He's a badass but can be scared off with garlic or killed with a wooden stake. In Vampyr the horror is really the fascinating but dreaded border between life and death, even between waking life and sleep. This horror is both elusive and omnipresent (therefore more unsettling) because it shows how imperceptibly we slip from life into death, from wakened state to helpless slumber. Vampyr charts out that vast but intangible territory between being alive and dead, being alert and dreaming. It's cinema as hypnosis, even beyond cinema as meditation of, say, Tarkovsky. (Though I didn't much care for Dead Man by Jarmusch, I thought, at its best, there were Dreyerian touches; namely that white man can only think of life and death in violently dialectical terms whereas for the Indian there is no clear boundary between the two; thus, white man Depp's slip into death as guided by the Indian becomes truly epic)

I think among the great filmmakers, only a handful had talent comparable to Dreyer's. Mizoguchi was one. Ugetsu, like Vampyr, puts us in a trance and til it's over we're transfixed. The effect on the audience is total, musical. Kurosawa was one of the greatest but his images never accumulated this kind of power. Kurosawa's films were houses constructed of wood whereas Mizoguchi's films are trees themselves. Organic and alive. Bresson was perhaps another one yet his ascetic aesthetic sometimes went for threadbare expression that remained too stark and cerebral to attain the kind of power in films such as Passion of Joan of Arc and Vampyr.

**Carl Dreyer's creepy vampire mystery**, December 12, 2002  
**Reviewer:** Zev Bazarov (S. FL)
Carl Dreyer, one of Scandinavia's finest directors, brought this film to the screen in 1932. It is image driven, with not a lot of dialog. Dreyer creates a number of scenes, with the atmosphere raised to the peak, with scary music playing throughout the film. We see Allan, an occult researcher staying at a house. He sees some very scary, weird things there. It seems vampires are controlling the people there, and it is up to him to save them, destroy the vampire, and escape. We follow him investigating the gothic home, with images of death in every room. In one scene he dreams of his own burial! We don't see much of the vampire though, mostly the haunting effects it has on the residents. This film is really creepy, and atmospheric. I'd recommend it highly to those who enjoy the old style, slow, spooky, gothic horror films. 4 stars.

A cornerstone., May 15, 2002
Reviewer: Sean Gill (Hampstead, MD USA)

Whereas Dreyer's The Passion of Joan of Arc, 4 years this film's senior, is obsessed with showing the audience through close-ups and inventive framing, Vampyr is a film possessed of the perverse knowledge that the camera's eye is capable of exclusion. Understanding this, Dreyer is able to create the idea of terror by suggesting it, rather than evoking. The result is a chilling work that may fall numb on Hollywood viewers.

Vampyr is presumably a film produced under UFA, as was Dreyer's film Mikael. This allows me to make parallels to Fritz Lang that might otherwise be stretched. Primarily I speak of the pervasion of the death's head, a symbol found in two of Lang's earliest films: Der Mude Tod and Die Nibelungen. (The former, in turn, is likened to Dreyer's Leaves From Satan's Book by film theorist Tom Gunning.) In Lang this is a mechanical figure of destiny which is fought against with the heart, and to some avail. In Dreyer, it is a biological figure pitted against the heart, to similar ends. Both Vampyr and Der Mude Tod see lovers together at their finales. Lang is simply the more modern of the two, and Dreyer (to me) the more compelling.

There are also the ambiguous perceptions of women. Both seem strongly influenced by Nietzsche's (nearly contemporary) idea that women are capable of much and rarely achieve it, falling victim, instead, to the vampire male. Dreyer, of course, reverts to Goethe after exploiting this, and the problem is found to be feminine. Lang refuses this, even in Metropolis. (Again, Lang proves more modern.)

As a talkie this film shows its auteur's history as a silent film maker. Sound is only used when necessary. There are intertitles. There's a bit where a character reads from a book and the passages he reads are shown as intertitles, which I really enjoy.

The unfortunate things are the subtitles - which are, as you've probably read, in a weird gothic font and take up half the screen with their Closed-Caption like backgrounds (intertitles also appear in this font - Germany gave up with the "gothic" type lettering during WW2 because it was so hard for non-natives to read.). I'm not really sure how original the score is, either. It seems as though the movie would be beyond belief without it, or with a more suited example (Einhorn's score for the Criterion Joan of Arc, for example). And the picture quality is really poor, which can be expected. But there are certain things which are strictly the fault of the production company. For example, there are frames of the movie subtitled in other languages, presumably from previous releases used to produce this release.

Of Vampyr, Dreyer said: "I wanted to create the daydream on film and wanted to show that horror is not a part of the things around us, but of our own subconscious mind."

What a remarkable job he did! Lynch and Bergman, and a few dozen other names to which history has been more kind, owe a great deal to this film.

Emotional and Psychological Horror Film, September 4, 2005
"Vampyr" (1932 - 75 minutes - B&W), is a shady spectacle of morbidity, directed by the brilliant Danish director, Carl Theodor Dreyer (1889-1968), one of the most important names of the cinema history. The movie is based on the classic "Carmilla", of Sheridan Le Fanu, and tells the story of a man called Allan Grey (the actor Julian West), a studious of vampires. He arrives at a city to investigate a supernatural case and find, in a half-abandoned inn, an enigmatic old man and his daughters. The old man, without explanation, gives a book to Grey and asks him to open the book only after his death. The book contains important information about vampires. Carl Dreyer began his career as a journalist making summaries of films. In Germany, he knew the photograph director, Rudolph Maté, the wizard of the gray and black and white tones. With the partnership of Maté, Dreyer could caught all the ways of the German Expressionism movement in its beginning, with the delirious scenes, a lot of make-up, subjectivity of the characters, light effects to show the contrast between darkness and lightness, and the emotional and Metaphysical narrative. The first film of terror to show a strong emotional and psychological content was "Nosferatu", of Murnau, in 1922. But was with "Vampyr" that the style was more evident. In the film, where dream and reality mixes, the director studies many styles, exploring the light contrasts, to talk about aspects of the interior and supernatural universe of his characters, what allowed the Dreyer-Mate partnership to place all their originality. For example: they used until gauze on the lenses to create some Metaphysical and misty effects in some scenes of the story.

**Great German horror.** March 26, 2005  
Reviewer: Jackson Eggers (Rockledge, Fl)

The story is that traveling occult expert David Grey happens upon an inn that is being slowly drained by a vampire. That is about all the plot you get, I'm afraid. The story (which seems very Edgar Allen Poe-ish) is told mostly through images with long periods of silence, much like the future "2001: A Space Odyssey" over twenty years later would do. And even the dialogue that there is in Deutsch (German) with English subtitles (but they are in very chunky gothic style type). If Hitler and the Nazis would not have come to power, I think Germany could have given Hollywood's Universal horror movies a run for their money back then. The book Grey is left to read is a tome on the Occult, which gives him the secrets he needs to know to defeat the vampire and her minion shadow creatures, takes up a lot of time, as the passages are thrown up for you to read (maybe a few too many). It has a very spooky ambiance and atmosphere with it's old houses, foggy woods, and eerie lakes; gothic surroundings not rivaled until the Hammer films of the '50s and '60s. The film was ahead of its time with some of its ideas and special effects. The shadows that move independently of its source (Francis Ford Coppola would borrow this for his own vampire flick in 1992). I really liked this movie, but it certainly isn't for everyone; it requires patience and you will certainly have to really think about what is going on when Grey leaves his body late in the movie. This is for hard core genre fans.

**Vital contribution to early film.** March 12, 2000  
Reviewer: Johnny S. Geddes (Northern Ireland)

This film is truly outstanding. It's possible to even go so far as to call 'Vampyr' the last in the line of German cinema expressionist movies; evidence to suggest the influences of 'The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari' and 'Nosferatu' certainly abounds throughout.

First things first; the film has no tangible plot to follow except that the storyline is loosely strung on a young man's attempt to fight vampirism in a small (Danish?) town. While the lack of plot sounds bad in the abstract, there is so much strength in the movie's other attributes that the issue of story structure soon fades in the viewer's mind. Imagery provides 'Vampyr' with its raison d'etre. One haunting, shadowy image segues into the next to make for a horror experience that's far subtler than what Universal Studios was starting to crank out at the time of this film's release. Director Carl Dreyer apparently shot some of the scenes through gauze to enhance the ghost-like wispiness of the sequences.
The effect is utterly magical. Combine that with kinks like reverse filming (man 'digging' the grave), an eerie cello/clarinet-led score as well as a virtually absent dialogue and you've got a film that addresses horror on a high level.

It's important to understand this as you watch, although the scenes are consistently textured enough to remind you that you're trapped in a black and white nightmare experience for the entire duration of the picture. The film seems to become more ethereal every minute and by the time the vampiric crone is done away with, the viewer has been through too harrowing an affair to be able to see how a semi-happy ending can make those feelings of disquiet ebb away. It must be said that it took guts to produce this film. 'Vampyr' breaks many conventions, including its [by then] out of fashion clinging to the techniques and dogma of silent cinema when everyone else was rushing forward to flourish in the new glory of sound. But Dreyer's film is also revolutionary against the conventions of film-making in general. Even Weine's 'The Cabinet of Dr Caligari' didn't dare to be so progressive as to do away with a storyline (its one is very complex, in fact). What results is a work as bizarre in form as Dalí's 'Un Chien Andalou' and yet coherent and accessible through its ability to convey fear in a language higher than the banal or everyday.

One of the great horror films, March 10, 1999
Reviewer: Dave Clayton "Wereaardvark" (San Diego, CA USA)

Directed in France by the legendary Danish director Carl Dreyer, Vampyr is not only one of the best horror films but also probably one of the greatest films ever made. Unlike the American horror pictures like Frankenstein that were being made at the same time, Vampyr has relatively little action but a sustained atmosphere of strangeness like that of few other movies. The action takes place during one night and the entire film has a slow, trance-like quality. The picture quality of the DVD is vastly superior to that of the older videotapes—the film was photographed by the great Rudolph Mate—but the sound recording is shaky at the best, and the dialogue is hard to follow even for someone who understands German. The music comes across more effectively but is boomy in some passages—it's a good idea to reduce the bass before viewing. The DVD like an earlier video has quite large subtitles in Gothic type—designed I think to eliminate Danish subtitles—which unfortunately mask a third or so of the picture in some shots.

A Visual Nightmare!! Wonderful To Look At!, December 8, 1998
Reviewer: A viewer

It has a dreamy, surreal structure. It seems as if there is no structure at all to this story. Very, very loosely-based on "Carmilla," this free-form adaptation contains countless memorable images, including the dancing shadows, Julian West's character watching his own funeral, and a skull that "watches" people. Play this one at the next Halloween party. Very creepy.