



ABOVE and RIGHT: Countess Elizabeth Bathory (Delphine Seyrig) whispers sweet nothings to the innocent wife (Daniele Ouimet) while the bisexual husband (DARK SHADOWS' John Karlen) rinses a few things with the Countess' lover (Andrea Rau).



the Countess is unexpectedly impaled during a freak car accident. This film closes with the knowledge that Valerie will carry the vampiric flame in her stead.

Upon its release, *DAUGHTERS OF DARKNESS* received decidedly mixed reviews. The *New York Times* commended the film for being "subtle, stately, stunningly colored and exquisitely directed;" the *Village Voice* chided rather unfairly that the movie "demonstrates neatly why there isn't a Belgian film industry." Matters weren't helped by the comically misleading advertisement blurb, which teased, "If you think these ladies are something. . . wait until you meet MOTHER, she's something else!"

Although only 87 minutes in length in its U.S. release (some of the sexually explicit and violent elements were trimmed from the original 96-minute running time), the film seems overly long as a result of story inconsistencies. For example, even though Bathory incites Valerie to defy her husband's abusive tendencies near the end of the film, she also goads her into asking his forgiveness—after which they murder him! There's also a lame subplot, left unresolved, involving a detective (Georges Jamin) who has been tracking Bathory's bloody path through Europe.

Seyrig excepted, the actors are, at best, only adequate. Especially bad is Daniele Ouimet, who delivers a catatonic nonperformance as the bewildered bride. She is so emotionless throughout that it is difficult to decide when the character is herself and when she is under the spell of the Countess.

The film contains several riveting scenes that have surely influenced later filmmakers. The red-tinted, nude vampir-

istic love scene between Bathory and Valerie, and the ending of the film, in which a novice vampire carries on for her creator, is mirrored in similar scenes in 1983's *THE HUNGER*. Dutch director Paul Verhoeven's stylish *THE FOURTH MAN* (1984) is also reminiscent of Kümel's film in its concern with the supernaturally-tinted downfall of a bisexual antihero at the hands of a vampirishly predatory woman who lives in a desolate seaside town.

There have been many memorable grand entrances in vampire films: Bela Lugosi's eerie descent down a cobweb-en-shrouded stairway in 1931's *DRACULA*, Frank Langella's dramatic arrival as he majestically removes his cloak with a flourish in 1979's remake, or almost any of Christopher Lee's spectacularly staged appearances in the Hammer series. In *DAUGHTERS OF DARKNESS*, it's the Countess' electrifying entrance in a blood-red sports coupe that gives the male-dominated vampire genre a much-needed kick in the pants. From the moment she emerges from the night, exquisitely bedecked in black fur and veil, French actress Delphine Seyrig owns the film.

Seyrig, who died in 1990, was a well-respected performer who worked with some of the world's greatest European directors in a number of modern classics of the avant-garde and mainstream cinema. These include Alain Resnais' *LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD* (1961), Francois Truffaut's *STOLEN KISSES* (1968), and Luis Buñuel's *DISCREET CHARM*

OF THE BOURGEOISIE (1972). As the Countess, Seyrig creates a thoroughly charming character who is equal parts platinum-blond screen siren and black-hearted villainess. The ultimate haute-couture spider, she serenely glides through the evil proceedings outfitted in crimson pleats, purple and black feathers, patent leather, and silver lamé. She wickedly credits her ageless beauty to "a strict diet and lots of sleep," and sweetly warns a nemesis, "You will find it greatly to your advantage to be nice to me." There is an especially unnerving scene in which the hotel's concierge, Pierre (Paul Esser), recalls meeting the Countess 40 years earlier when he was a bellboy and she looked *exactly* the same. Seyrig's skillful talent makes us believe her capable of the kindest graciousness and the most dastardly of crimes.

Toward the end of the film, Bathory reveals a glimpse of her eternal, melancholy existence in a poignantly effective monologue: "I'm just an outmoded character. . . nothing more. Yes, you know, the beautiful stranger, slightly sad, slightly mysterious, that haunts one place after another." Long after the memory of *DAUGHTERS OF DARKNESS* fades to red in our minds, Seyrig's Countess rises up in our dreams with the promise of an opulent afterlife. Just remember, behind the gloss of those ruby lips lies an unquenchable thirst. . .

—Michael Orlando Yaccarino

Daughters of Darkness