Kiss of the Vampire film poster
(1963)

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PRODUCT CONTEXT

*   Produced by Hammer Film Productions and distributed by J. Arthur Rank and Universal, *Kiss of the Vampire* was intended to be the second sequel to 1958's *Dracula*, although the film's script actually makes no reference to Stoker's character. This is perhaps to distance itself from unfavourable comparisons to the superior Christopher Lee who starred in the original film.
*   In addition to *Dracula*, Hammer had, by 1963, success with other 'monster movie' franchises such as *The Mummy* and *Frankenstein*. Distributers Universal also saw early success with films in this genre.
*   Historically, 1963 saw the early stages of 'Beatlemania' and the so-called 'swinging sixties', the assassination of JFK and the Soviet Union launching the first woman into space.

PART 1: STARTING POINTS – Media language

Cultural context:

The 1960s **audience** for this advert could be assumed to be familiar with the **codes and conventions** of 'monster movie' film posters – such as its **composition, fonts** and **representations** of 'the monster' and its (usually female) victims. Interesting **intertexts** for comparative study might include:

The Evil of Frankenstein (1964)
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0058073/mediaviewer/rm2054095104

Blood From The Mummy's Tomb (1971)
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0068290/mediaviewer/rm892444416

Consider codes and conventions, and how media language influences meaning:

*   The capitalised, **serif font** of the title creates **connotations** linked to the vampire film **genre** with its 'wooden' styling (referencing the vampire's coffin or the stake needed to kill him perhaps) and the blood dripping from the letter V's 'fang.'
*   The use of a 'painted' main image is highly **conventional** of films of the period and links to the poster for Christopher Lee's *Dracula*, but the fact that it's in colour (**anchored** by the text "In Eastman Color") **connotes** that this is a modern telling of an older story.
*   The gloomy grey, black and brown **colour palette** reinforces the film's dark, scary **conventions** while the red highlight colour draws attention to the attacking bats, the vampire and the blood – all key **visual signifiers** for the genre.
*   **Conventionally**, the stars are listed with the more highly paid male actors first and in order of fame, Clifford Evans having starred in Hammer's 1961 hit *Curse of the Werewolf.*

Consider theoretical perspectives
Semiotics – Roland Barthes

*   Suspense is created through the **enigmas** surrounding the **connoted** relationship between the male and female vampires (emphasised by the "kiss" of the title) and the fate of their two victims (**Barthes' Hermeneutic Code**).
*   **Barthes' Semantic Code** could be applied to images of the bats and their conventional association with vampirism and horror in general.

- The **Symbolic Codes (Barthes)** of horror, darkness and fear are more widely reinforced through **signifiers** such as the moon and the male victim's 'submissive sacrifice' **gesture code**.

A level only:
Structuralism – Claude Lévi-Strauss
- The idea that texts are constructed through the use of **binary oppositions** could be applied to the opposing **representations** of the vampires and their victims, and the romantic **connotations** of "kiss" opposed in the film's title to the **stereotypical** "vampire" monster.

PART 2: STARTING POINTS – Representation

Political and social contexts:
The 1960s is often seen as the start of women's sexual liberation, aided by events such as the introduction of the contraceptive pill in 1960. More women than ever were entering the paid workforce and sixties feminists were campaigning for equal pay, an end to sexual harassment and more equality between men and women in wider society. In America, equal pay legislation was passed in 1963.

'Older' **stereotypes** of women as passive victims of men and more modern 'male fears' of women challenging male dominance could both be seen to be encoded in this film poster.

Consider how representations are constructed through processes of selection and combination:
- Both women wear pale dresses made of light materials and these **dress codes** serve to reinforce their femininity by highlighting the curves of their bodies and revealing the flesh of their upper chests and arms.
- The **gesture code** of the woman on the left is that of the **stereotypical** passive victim of the 'monster', his power highlighted by the fact that he's holding her by just one arm.
- Baring her teeth and with her arm raised almost fist-like as she's being bitten by the bat, the second woman's gesture codes are more aggressive, and the submissive pose of her male 'victim' (including being on his knees with his head back and throat exposed) represent her in a non-stereotypically dominant way.

- The vampire himself seems uncharacteristically fearful in his **gesture codes** with his arm thrown across his body in a defensive gesture, perhaps protecting himself from the female vampire.

Consider theoretical perspectives:
- **Stuart Hall's theory of representation** – the images of a castle, bats, the vampire's cape and dripping blood form part of the "shared conceptual road map" that give meaning to the "world" of the poster. The **audience** is actively encouraged to **decode** this familiar **generic iconography**.
- **David Gauntlett's theory of identity** – perhaps the female vampire acts as a **role model** for women struggling against male oppression or desperate to be seen as the equals of men, whatever the narrative or environment.

A level only:
- **Liesbet Van Zoonen's feminist theory** – by assuming this '**co-antagonist**' role, the female vampire is perhaps contributing to social change by representing women in non-traditional roles (**Van Zoonen, 1989**) though the passive female victim does reinforce these.