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Shute

Blacula Reading Assignment #1

*Blacula* represents slavery largely through its presentation of African American actors in the film. In the article, an argument is made that Mamuwalde as a character parallels the prototypical black slave worker when Dracula names him Blacula, similar to how a slave owner calls their slaves “negro” in an attempt to dehumanize them for business (Lehman & Browning, 28). The slavery comparison is also evident in the few clips covered in class. In the warehouse scene where the investigators are jumped, most of, if not all, of the vampires are black, and portrayed in a very primitive light. This is shown in their dingy outfits, highlighting their lack of material wealth, their mindless attack strategy (or lack thereof), and their focus on attacking the uniformed white man instead of a more realistic split targeting of all investigators equally, highlighting their perceived lack of intelligence. These behaviors can be seen as an attempt to satire typical portrayals of African American slaves in western media by overexaggerating the exact same features white people use to justify enslavement in a comical, campy manner.

William Marshall, the actor of Mamuwalde in *Blacula*, transgresses African American filmic character types in *Blacula*in a few notable ways. In particular, before being vampirized, Prince Mamuwalde was characterized by his “stature, education, and grace” (Lehmen & Browning, 27-28). This was a novelty for an African American character of the time, when most black actors and characters were included in a stereotypically negative way (Lehmen & Browning, 27). In addition, apart from the blaxploitation genre at large, there were very few movies before Blacula that had black characters in key roles. Having Marshall play a character with agency already transgresses the African American filmic character types discussed in class, and making him play the titular character further underscores this point.