



The Lost Boys

Thursday 27th March, 11.00am, Cinemobile

Study Guide **Cairde Tobin**

The Lost Boys

The Lost Boys (1987)

Cast List

Michael Emmerson	Jason Patric
Sam Emmerson	Corey Haim
Lucy Emmerson	Dianne Wiest
Grandpa	Barnard Hughes
Max	Edward Hermann
David	Kiefer Sutherland
Star	Jami Gertz
Edgar Frog	Corey Feldman
Alan Frog	Alan Frog
Paul	Brooke McCarter
Dwayne	Billy Wirth
Mark	Alex Winter
Laddie	Chance Michael
Nanook (the dog)	Cody

Crew

Director	Joel Schumacher
Screenplay	Jeffrey Boam, Janice Fischer, James Jeremias
Producer	Harvey Bernhard
Cinematographer	Michael Chapman
Music	Thomas Newman

Joel Schumacher Filmography: Director

Incredible Shrinking Woman (1980)
D.C. Cab (1984)
St Elmo's Fire (1985)
The Lost Boys (1987)
Cousins (1989)
Flatliners (1990)
Dying Young (1991)
Falling Down (1993)
The Client (1994)
Batman Forever (1995)
A Time To Kill (1996)
Batman & Robin (1997)
8MM (1999)
Flawless (1999)
Bad Company (2002)
Tigerland (2000)
Phone Booth (2003)
Veronica Guerin (2003)
On the Road (2003)
Phantom of the Opera (2003)

Joel Schumacher

"The only good advice you can give anyone is to be the witness of what you have learned in your own life."

The director.

This American director was born in New York in 1939. After attending Parsons School of Design at New School University, New York, he began working in film. Much of his early career was spent as a costume designer and many of his film credits from the 1970s are under this title. He has also worked as a writer, producer, production designer and actor. Many of his films explore the dark side of the human condition and often examine the extremes of human behaviour. This

aspect of his filmmaking is to the forefront in 'Falling Down', 'Flatliners' and '8mm'. Never afraid of spectacle, Schumacher's films are often ostentatious and betray his background in design, Batman Forever, Batman & Robin, and 'The Lost Boys' are typical examples of this aspect of his work. Schumacher pared back the visual aspects of his film-making with his 2000 film 'Tigerland' which was well received and continued this narrative driven work with his recent production on the life of Dublin journalist Veronica Guerin. He has also directed music videos for Seal, The Smashing Pumpkins and INXS.

Introduction

Set in America in the eighties, *The Lost Boys* is a film about growing up, changing, fitting in and surviving. Director, Schumacher invites us into a world that is at once intriguing and unsettling and he never allows us to become truly comfortable there. Santa Carla is a seaside town at odds with its people, where the living and the dead co-exist and the missing person's wall is full of lost faces. The uneasy atmosphere is created through snappy editing and clever camera work and is always full of surprises.

When the Emmerson family move to Santa Carla after a divorce, their two all-American sons are faced with a myriad of new problems. How can they adapt to the new surroundings, make friends, meet new people and survive without a television? Their mother, Lucy, is also faced with challenges; she is trying to move on after her divorce and find a new job while taking care of her two growing sons. Her father, Grandpa, is also coping with change as his two teenage grandsons invade his space and wreak havoc in his home.

Coming to terms with the stress of moving home and moving State should have been enough for the Emmersons to contend with but they are also forced to deal with the extraordinary consequences of moving to 'the murder capitol of America'. Santa Carla has a secret, which threatens to destroy the family one by one.

Although it is not considered a classic film, 'The Lost Boys' doesn't flinch from tackling a number of relevant issues. It belongs to a very distinct genre of story telling and it cleverly reworks the mythology of the vampire. The comedic and melodramatic approach of its storytelling often relegates it into the classification of entertainment however this categorisation underestimates its validity as a horror coming of age film. Its sounder exploration of the Outsider, the family in crisis, the pack mentality and addiction reveals it to be a film as relevant today as it was sixteen years ago.



The Story

Made in 1989, 'The Lost Boys' follows the destructive relationship between Michael, the new boy in town, and David, leader of the resident vampires in Santa Carla.

We first meet the Emmerson family in their car as they drive along the coast road towards Santa Carla. They are singing together and appear to be a closely-knit family. This introduction sets them apart from the previous glimpse of the vampire gang in action. The scene where we encounter grandpa is warm and amusing and his wacky worldview allows us to relax. There is nothing threatening about this family but their out of town innocence makes them vulnerable in their new surroundings.

On the first night of their stay the Emmerson boys explore their new neighbourhood, as they wander around the fairground they are distracted by it's eerie atmosphere. When they stop to watch an outdoor concert Michael becomes fixated on a beautiful woman in the crowd – the attraction is immediate and he impulsively trails her through the chaotic carnival landscape. What Michael doesn't realise is that Star is the bait and he is the prey. Sam, now abandoned, wanders into a comic shop where he encounters the neo-militaristic comic duo, Edgar and Alan Frog, who warn him that the town is infested with vampires. They advise him to be vigilant and although Sam is sceptical he takes their number a vampire comic before leaving. Meanwhile Lucy finds a job in a video store with the only man who can control David's gang. If this all sounds very coincidental don't be surprised, it is all planned by the powers of evil.

Michael meets David, a cool blond rebel on a motorbike, who ridicules Michael's attempts to impress Star. Finding himself belittled, Michael challenges David, who, in response starts a race and almost runs Michael off a cliff. After this near miss, Michael is vexed and offers to fight David on his own. David, amused by Michael's innocent chivalry, invites him into the vampire's layer where he is tricked into drinking some of David's blood. Once he drinks, he feels a change and his body starts to transform. He has a craving for blood and doesn't know why. It isn't until he attempts to attack his own brother that he realises the creature that he has become. Sam, remembering the cautions of the Frog brothers, calls them for help, they advise him to kill Michael. Although Sam is

terrified he refuses to 'stake' (kill) his brother and the Frog brothers come up with a plan to find and execute the Master vampire so that all the half-vampires like Michael will be restored. The only problem is finding the Master vampire.

The Frog brothers' plan to save Michael begins with a trip to the cave where they search for the sleeping vampires and stake them while they are defenceless. The plan goes horribly wrong and the crusaders are forced to retreat in the knowledge that come nightfall, the vampire gang will come for revenge.

Amidst the frantic developments in Michael's life, his mother is developing a relationship with her boss, Max. Max is a friendly gentle character who is finding it very difficult to actually have a proper date with Lucy. But he is patient and after two disastrous attempts the couple resolve to try a third time. It is while Lucy and Max are on their third date all hell breaks loose at the Emmerson home and a great finale fight ensues. Armed with garlic-powered artillery and a bow and arrow, Sam, Michael and the Frog brothers vanquish each demon one by one. This is by far the most gruesome scene in the film but it brings the story to a crescendo. But everything does not go according to plan as despite the destruction of 'The Lost Boys', Star, Laddie and Michael remain half-vampire and this can only mean one thing – The master is still alive. Cue Max.

Lucy returns with Max to find her home decimated and her children frantic. Michael won't come out of the shadows because he has changed and Sam is covered in gore. She is utterly confused and looks to Max for backup but the support she receives is not what she expected. Max changes into his vampire persona, strangles Sam and asks Lucy to join him so that he can create the ultimate vampire clan. This is a wonderfully tense moment in the film and Schumacher gives us just enough time to believe the Lucy might sacrifice herself for the sake of her sons. But Grandpa drives through the wall and aptly skewers Max on timber posts. Michael, Star and Laddie are free from their curse and we leave the family to their new peace.

Questions

What are the turning points in the film?

What big decisions do the characters make in this film?

The role of the family Finding a father

With the absence of a father figure we see Michael thrust into the role of parent to his younger brother. As the eldest, he is expected to take certain responsibility for his little brother. He takes Sam with him to the fairground, when Lucy goes to dinner, it is Michael who stays at home to baby-sit. But as Michael is sucked into the underworld he is more reluctant to take a paternal role. Indeed his abandonment of his brother at the fairground when he is distracted by Star is an early warning sign that he is railing against this responsibility. However, although he is rebelling against this expectation, he clearly loves his brother and is shocked into action when he almost makes Sam his first victim. Lucy is likewise concerned with the care and protection of her family. She moves to Santa Carla to give them a new start and hopes that the troubles of their previous life will be left behind. Michael's sudden change in behaviour worries her and she desperately tries to communicate with him before it is too late. Sam being the baby of the family is also starting to mature and while fighting to be taken seriously by his mother and older brother, he tries to protect and save his brother without worrying his mother. He is at a cross over point in growing up. His own desperation to vanquish the demons shows his need to take his own control over the situation and at the end of the film we see Sam as somehow older.

Schumacher's treatment of the two families, the vampire and the mortal, is very interesting. When Max reveals his intentions at the end of the film it is clear that the combination of the combined strengths of the families would indeed make them very powerful. This possibility is hinted at and built up throughout the film. While Lucy is looking for a male companion and possible anchor for Michael's bad behaviour, Max is looking for a mother figure for his boys. Each parent character is seeking to replace their ex-partner, to somehow control the behaviour of their offspring. In this respect the film tackles the issue of parental replacement. In one of the funnier scenes in the film, Max's invite to dinner, Sam decides to use his visit as an opportunity to test him. The series of tricks and tests result in amusing slapstick humour with water spilling, garlic spiked food and sudden mirror flashing but. Lucy, misinterpreting the situation, questions Sam's motives and is frustrated at her role as parent.

Max makes the situation worse by doing the 'I don't want to replace your father' speech which curries favour with Lucy and embarrasses Sam.

The use of this speech is very manipulative and given Max's true intentions, the viewer would be forgiven for being cynical about the motivations behind the lecture. This feeds into the complex individual experience of young people who's parents are trying to pursue partners. We are behind Sam. Although Max has given no reason to be mistrusted, we do not trust him.

Schumacher's juxtaposition of the two families the living and undead is effective because it makes it very clear who the good and the bad elements are. While death surrounds the living at Grandpa's house, the living surround the undead in the vampire's lair. Similarly, the openness and equality between Lucy and her sons is in sharp contrast to the secrecy and control wielded in the vampire clan. David shows no interest in Laddie for example and he commands Star's obedience. Star's adoption of Laddie reveals her human side and as she assumes the role of his protector she gains our approval and trust. This responsibility also ensures her survival at the end of the film.

The vampire environment and temperament

The distinctions between the families are also infused in Schumacher's portrayal of place. The Emerson home is traditional with a twist of taxidermy but the large fireplace, big kitchen, and open living room reinforces both the charm the sense of openness in the family. The vampires are a different story. David brings us into his cave created by an earthquake on a fault line. This wonderful space is mesmerising to the uninitiated Michael and draws him deeper into danger. The underground culture is quite literally made underground in this space. The poster of Jim Morrison on the cave walls adds a sense of rock history and glamour. It could be the bedroom walls of a teenage Doors fan! But the cave is not simply a hangout, it is a home and as such forecasts the taste of Michael's life after the change. The space is compelling but dangerous. However, Schumacher waits until near the end of the film before we are shown the sleeping vault for the vampires. The sleeping chamber is sparse and dank and reveals the unglamorous and nasty side to



the vampire lifestyle. It is also in sharp contrast to Sam's room, which is bright and sunny and has posters of pin ups on the walls.

Questions

What other comparisons can you make between the world of the vampire and the world of the Emmersons?

Which world would you prefer? Why?

The Changes

Adolescence or infection

After Michael takes the blood we see him change in a number of ways. He sleeps all day and wakes at night, he finds bright light hard on his eyes, he becomes more moody and snappy with his family, he becomes withdrawn at home, he refuses to discuss his problems with Lucy and he becomes more secretive about his

activities at night. His body changes too. We see him retch at the milk and his face contorts first with anguish at the sight of the bonfire slaughter and second when he prepares to fight with David. He has also gained new skills, which surprise and frighten him. He is too afraid to jump from the rail line and as he changes in flight he writhes in agony. He is shocked again when he wakes up floating above his bed and when his body is sucked out of his room he becomes extremely distressed. These changes seem to fall into three categories, the biological, the sociological and the supernatural. His craving for blood, light sensitivity and cramping stomach suggests that his body is changing biologically. The shift in his sleeping pattern seems to allow for these changes. The sociological changes are affected by the other alterations to his character. If he is out all night and asleep all day then his companions will be those who share the

same living/social pattern. Thus Michael is drawn into a nocturnal scene and unreal neon half world inhabited by misfits and monsters. In order to be successful in this new life he will have to learn new rules and observe the supremacy of the pack. It could be argued that this is not unlike the experience of moving to secondary school; just as our bodies are in flux our social environment is uprooted and we have to learn a whole new game. The supernatural powers however, do not affect the average teenagers ability to live forever! And the ability to fly and wield inhuman strength is not common, although in the film they represent wish fulfilment and make Michael's hero status larger than life.

Questions

This film has been described as "Sending up the horrors of adolescence" (www.gothabilly.net) do you think that this is a justified remark?

What would you do if you knew that you could live forever?

Do his changes remind you of any other process of change in the body?

The Vampire Myth Origins and developments on the theme of the vampire

"Vampires, werewolves and many zombies have one thing in common: they feast upon the bodies of the living. Another thing they have in common is that they are infectious... we are all extremely vulnerable to the possibility of becoming vampires werewolves or zombies ourselves" (pp 144; Peter Nicholls, Fantastic Cinema, Ebury Press, London – 1984).

Popularised by Bram Stoker, an Irish theatre manager. Dracula was styled on a famous English actor Henry Irving and follows the story of Count Dracula of Transylvania who moves to Carfax Abbey London and preys on the people there. Having infected the beautiful Lucy, he is pursued by Dr Von Helsing and is eventually caught and destroyed. Since being published in 1897 Dracula has inspired countless plays, films, tv series and a whole genre of novel. One of the most famous contemporary writers is Ann Rice and her Lestat Chronicles. Although the books did not become successful until after his death, Stoker's image of Dracula clearly captured the imagination of readers

and inspired the development of the myth for over a hundred years. One of the reasons for this phenomenon is how the nature of the vampire's evolution and life can reflect the time of the times. The fact that the vampire is considered to be immortal also means that he/she can be depicted in any century. Stoker's Dracula brings his disease ashore and this could be a reference to the Contagious Diseases Acts (Health Legislation in the 19th Century). In Francis Ford Coppola's 'Bram Stoker's Dracula' (1992) the images he shows of blood platelets remind the viewer of the dangers of AIDS which was at the forefront of peoples minds at the time of the film. In most cases, however, the portrayal of the blood thirst is hypnotic and all consuming and in many ways recalls drug addiction. In 'The Lost Boys' Joel Schumacher points very clearly to this theme in the film sequence following Michael's first experience of blood. The film making is itself hypnotic and the composite shots of Michael reeling in the cave from the effects of David's blood are almost like images from a music video. The images are distorted, fragmented and layered. Likewise when Michael wakes up the morning after he looks like he has a hangover. We see the power of the craving again at the end of the film where Laddie, an innocent child, is transformed into a demon in search of blood. The conflict experienced by the blood addict is what makes the vampire story most interesting. The fact that Michael fights his desire to drink blood makes him an intriguing character to follow. In earlier versions of the myth the vampire is often shown as cold and unremorseful, like David, but one of the characteristics of late twentieth century interpretations of the story is the focus on the psychological impact of becoming an undead killer.

Questions

How would you represent a vampire of the twenty-first century?

What would they look like?

Would they belong to a social class?

What issues do you think the vampire myth can explore today?

Development of the contemporary Vampire

'The Lost Boys' is a rare vampire movie in that the vampire lifestyle is a thing of social status in the community. In most vampire movies it is either a thing of solitude, or of despair (www.movieprop.com)

Michael's journey into the world of the vampire is typical of the modern vampire character. Unlike his predecessors in *Nosferatu* and the stylings of Bela Lugosi, the modern vampire is not merely a psychopath: he is driven by something, as in the case of Coppola's Vampire Count Vlad Dracul who is driven by the desire to find a lost love. Louis in 'Interview with a Vampire' (1994) is tortured by the conflict between his human and vampire nature and is driven to find a reason for his being. Caleb (Adrian Pasdar) in 'Near Dark' (1987) likewise feeds on rats to avoid the consequences of his hunger while desperately seeking a way out. Martin (John Amplas) in 'Martin' (1976) is deeply disturbed and seeking of his own identity. Michael is typical of this new approach to the representation of the Vampire Myth. When Michael is faced with the very real danger of killing his brother, this is his moment of realisation; a point in the film, when he resolves to set in motion a plan to free himself from the curse. His humanity is tested again when he witnesses the slaughter at the bonfire and battles with his vampire instinct. However it is this internal war that makes him strong enough to take on the leader of 'The Lost Boys' and have a chance.

Style Melodrama

A form of drama popular in the 19th century, in which emphasis is placed on the more sensational aspects of the plot rather than upon characterisation or underlining philosophical significance... translated into the theatre melodrama signified the use of dramatic lighting and atmospheric effects, exaggerated heroes and villains and improbable plots to achieve a desired emotional impact ...lost favour towards the end of the century as audiences tired of its naivety, implausibility and conventionally happy endings, although some have argued that the form has enjoyed an unnoticed renaissance in the second half of the twentieth century through cinema and television (pp 330 –331; David Pickering, Sphere books, London – 1988).

Since its beginnings under the influences of Victorian Britain and in the world of the theatre, the style of *Dracula* has been hugely melodramatic. The social status of the vampire is usually high – *Dracula* was a Count, he had culture and class and could have the means to be a true villain and threat to the community. The heightened sensuality of the vampire coupled with the savagery of his/her nature creates a tension that filmmakers and writers have tried to harness. Schumacher responds to this challenge by creating a strange fairground feel to his film. We enter the film with a long air shot over the ocean and we fly in to the film with the gang. They introduce us to the film proving their social supremacy in Santa Carla. Then they take us to their hunting ground where nothing seems to be real. The three main locations in the film; the cave, grandpa's house and the fairground are all strange places. The cave is a lost space, secret and alluring. Grandpa's house is crammed with half animated stuffed animals and the fairground is chaotic and dreamlike. The principal turning points all happen in these locations and remind us that we are watching something unreal and heightened, sensual, exciting and in some places, silly.

The points in the story that mark the high moments of decision or change are likewise melodramatic. Michael's change into a vampire, for example, is not intended to be subtle. Schumacher makes it very clear that Michael has crossed a line into the unknown. The staking of the vampire in the cave is a gory experience with gallons of blood spraying over the gormless Frog brothers. The final showdown between the living and the undead is packed full of special effects, exploding bodies, corroding corpses and aerial fighting. This is typical of the melodramatic style where everything in the production is about showmanship. Another common feature of melodrama is its love of the sentimental, and a typical example of this is the lady in distress motif. Schumacher engages this device very effectively in 'The Lost Boys'. Star an attractive and willowy half-vampire who is waiting to be saved by Michael. The young lover in trouble is a perfect melodramatic set up. Star's beauty and apparent inability to help herself brings out the hero in Michael and this makes her a prime melodramatic heroine while confirming Michael's status as romantic lead. Lucy's role mirrors Star's and lacking any other male protector (in

the form of a husband) it is aptly within the melodramatic style that her father saves her. It is important too that the status quo must be returned and evil eradicated before the melodramatic story ends. Often the villain will get his comeuppance and suffer as a result of his dastardly behaviour. In the case of 'The Lost Boys' the only way to return to the status quo is by wiping out the legion of bloodsuckers and their leader and Schumacher does this with typical melodramatic panache.

Questions

Are there any other features of melodrama that you can identify in 'The Lost Boys'?

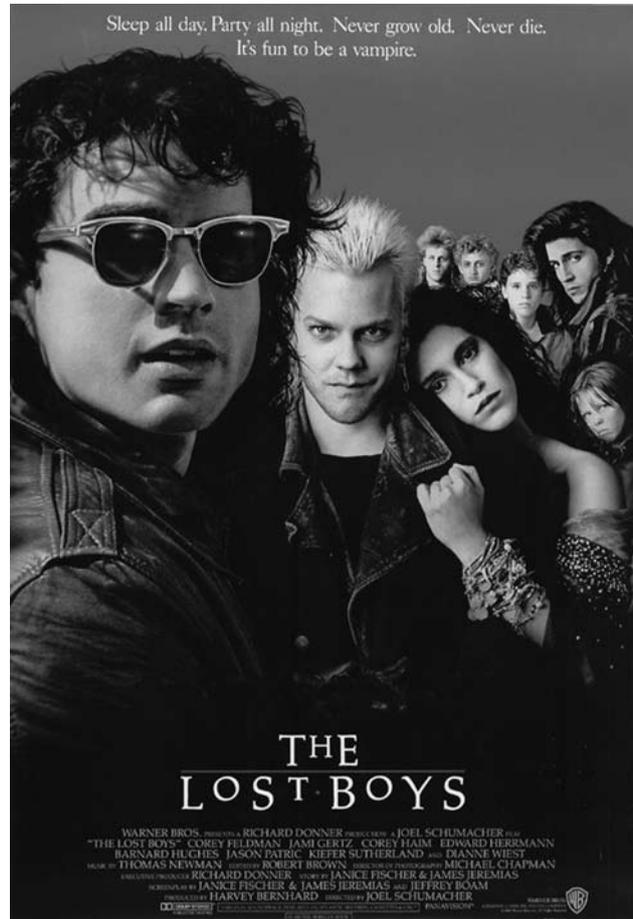
Do you think the world of the vampires is believable?

The gang/pack mentality

The underdog has his day

"Many of the innovations used by later vampire movies were developed in this film. Most earlier vampire films has a single Dracula character rather than a group of bloodsuckers" (www.gothabilly.net)

Our first encounter with the vampires is as a gang of thugs throwing their weight around the fairground on the roundabout. They are at odds with the fairground environment where everyone is having fun. This placing of them at odds with their environment reveals them to be wolves among sheep. This set up is quickly justified by their savage attack on the security guard who had earlier banned them from the boardwalk. They are a menacing presence on screen and although their styling positions them firmly in the 1980s the laughter accompanying their brutal attacks helps to remind us that they are serious contenders in the pecking order and nothing seems to be getting in their way. We never see them alone. They are always in a group, circling the fairground, attacking the bonfire gang, or in the cave. They sleep, laugh and murder together. This pack behaviour gives them a sense of impenetrability. It is hard to see how to break them up. Working in a pack also allows them to ridicule and undermine their victims before swooping for the kill. This cat and mouse method of torture is unnecessary and adds to their cruelty. The laughter that accompanies their entrances becomes a kind of calling card and it allows us to brace ourselves for their arrival. Indeed Schumacher alludes to the power of this technique in the scene where



Michael and Sam are threatened by the unseen forces of the pack outside their house. The sound of their motorbikes and their laughter is enough to send panic through us, to terrify Sam and worry Michael.

Thus Michael's confrontation with David is dangerous and makes us nervous. David continues to toy with him until the end of the film but the David and Goliath dynamic between the two men is quickly set up and is allowed to build to an exciting climax.

An interesting feature of David's power is not only his physical ability to slaughter and tear the roof off a car but his insidious psychological powers. When David invites Michael to eat rice and noodles and changes them into maggots and worms he ridicules him and the gang back him up every time. This teasing confuses Michael to the point where he doesn't believe Star's warnings about the wine. Thus David and his gang spin and weave

The Lost Boys

around his mortal prey, not only terrifying them but also making fools of them. This schoolyard taunting adds to the menacing sense of pack power in the film. Michael is a newcomer and his isolation from the environment and its people make him an easy target for the gang. He is alone, unknown and unprotected and appears to present no threat to the group. Because he seems to present no threat he is the best choice for the bully.

Similarly the Frog brothers are portrayed as underdogs. They have no fashion sense, work in a comic store and look like conspiracy theorists in the making. They even have trouble convincing Sam, another outsider, that they are worth taking seriously. We know that these are boys who are called names and have a hard time at school but yet they are instrumental in the great showdown and they are the first to score a hit on the vampires. In this film they are heroes.

In many ways 'The Lost Boys' is a victory film for the underdog. Most of the characters are outsiders with little social kudos and yet they avenge the deaths of the countless victims of the vampire tyranny and they save their town for the future. It reminds us that even a gang with supernatural powers is nothing against the isolated underdog who takes a stand.

Questions

Who do you think are the bullies in the film?

How could Michael have avoided becoming a vampire?

Do you think that Michael made the best choices in the film?

What would you have done in his place?

Michael and Sam kept the details of the vampire gang a secret. Do you think this was a good idea?

Last Word

'The Lost Boys', is an often overlooked vampire film but it has a lot to offer. It gives a very interesting insight into an underground culture and explores the vulnerability of the outsider and the gang dynamic. It also deals with other cultural problems like addiction and bullying while managing to be entertaining. While its story telling comes from a 19th century trend and its visual look and style is very much set in the eighties, the problems raised in the film are as relevant now as they were when the film was made. Although the story of the vampire has been remade and retold in more popular films, 'The Lost Boys' is a film of its generation which can continue to intrigue new audiences. The ideas are in the film. You just have to look.