

## **Review: In ‘Therapy for a Vampire,’ the Count Really Wants to Change**

By MANOHLA DARGISJUNE 9, 2016



Karl Fischer, left, and Tobias Moretti in "Therapy for a Vampire," written and directed by David Ruehm.  
Petro Domenigg/Music Box Films

The title of the Austrian movie “Therapy for a Vampire” sounds like the setup for a joke or an unlikely self-help book. It’s a promising title given that Sigmund Freud treated a patient whom he called the Wolf Man, a constipated Russian aristocrat who dreamed of white wolves. It’s promising, too, given Freud’s writings on the uncanny, the return of the repressed and what he called our “our unmistakable tendency to push death aside.”

The movie takes place in 1932, two years after the publication of Freud’s “Civilization and Its Discontents,” about the battle between eros and death. So, when a depressed vampire, Count von Kozsnom (Tobias Moretti), visits Freud (Karl Fischer), unfolding his long frame on the doctor’s famous rug-draped couch, the movie seems headed down the right laugh-lined path. Certainly there’s humor — and the glint of a witty, critical take on therapy — when, during one session, the Count begins levitating before Freud, who’s too busy scribbling notes to notice. Dreams of flying, the real Freud noted, are erection dreams, and the Count has stirred to life.

If the movie fails to do likewise, it’s because it has little bite and not nearly enough laughs or thought. (Strangely, it also dodges the coming war.) The Count has been driven into analysis because he’s unhappy with his wife, Elsa (Jeanette Hain), a harridan obsessed by her inability to see her reflection. Soon, though, the Count begins fixating on another woman, Lucy (Cornelia Ivancan), which sidelines Freud and his role in the story. The writer-director David Ruehm doesn’t just stick to basic vampire lore, he also commits to some of the dustier motifs in the comedy of the unhappy marriage: the besieged husband, the nagging wife and the much younger (mortal) woman.

Mr. Ruehm’s stagy visual choices give the movie a vague theatricality, as do the bare-bones production design and the exaggerated performances, most of which tend to be pitched toward

the last row in the house. The actors are all pleasant company, but it's Mr. Moretti with his mournfully, mischievously expressive face — his features seem locked in a war between melancholia and self-mockery — who offers a look at the movie that might have been. It's a performance that expresses the familiar vampire world-weariness, the hauteur and exhaustion, but also offers the kind of self-knowing humor you expect when a Viennese vampire and a shrink walk into a movie.