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# Morality and the Movies Week 5.

## Andrew Graves

### Tod Browning and Freud

- In his essay 'The Uncanny' Freud talked about the relationship between Castration Complex and Macabre Fantasy (or horror).

### The Doppelganger

- The basis for all 'monster' images.
- Jekyll and Hyde
- Frankenstein
- The Werewolf
- The Vampire
- The Doppelganger is "a defense mechanism; the unconscious mind, sensing a mortal danger to the ego, eye, limb or genital, creates an imaginative stand-in for the threatened part"
- Frankenstein creates another 'self'
- Alfonzo has an extra thumb

### Tod Browning and Castration Fear?

"Tod Browning was turning castration symbolism into a cottage industry. The image of human beings paralyzed, mutilated, or otherwise 'cut off' below the waist occurs repeatedly in Browning films."

**David J Skal**

### Dracula (1931) – typical Browning?

- Not too far removed from his carnival days
- Dracula is 'ultimate con man'
- Renfield, to all intents and purposes is the side show geek, devouring insects and small animals alive
- Dracula is also a 'Castrated Seducer' unable to penetrate in the usual manner –(un)dead from the waist down

### Historical Context

"During the war women fought maneuvered, bribed and schemed to get into the front-line trenches. In their hearts, in their conscious minds, they believed that they were striving for that place in order to provide deeds of duty and mercy...but mixed in with this high motive was the ghoulish compulsion to see men torn and bloody and in agony...the need to look upon suffering" - **Bela Lugosi**

**Dracula: The Ultimate Capitalist**

- Takes everything gives nothing
- Sucks the life out of victims
- Promises the world but offers destruction
- Despite the 'destructive' quality – remains highly seductive
- Victims – gladly submitting to 'his' power

"Ninety percent of the people are morbid minded...more people would gather to look at a dead horse in the street than would assemble to watch the finest coach go by." - **Tod Browning**

**Freaks (1932)**

Tod Browning

**Contradictions**

"A creeping duality is omnipresent in *Freaks*. Although Browning wins our sympathy towards his twisted protagonists early on in the film, both the wedding feast and the lightning illuminated shots of them at the climax, slithering through the mud with vengeful intent, are truly shocking and re-establish an ambiguity toward their role; are they heroes or, ultimately monsters?" - **Jack Hunter**

"[in *Freaks*] Tod Browning's amputation/castration fixation had finally achieved delirium pitch." - **Inside Teradome**

- Sexual inadequacy and frustration drive the entire story
- Phroso the clown – hints at his own impotence – "You should have seen me before the operation"
- In the original script, Hercules is castrated and forced to sing soprano in the freak pit. Still heavily hinted at in the final version
- Cleopatra is 'cut down' to size
- Hans cannot 'consummate' his marriage to his 'normal' sized wife
- The hermaphrodite dreams of 'auto copulation'
- The conjoined twin's marriage is treated as 'a joke'
- The film was heavily criticized
- "There is no excuse for this picture. It took a weak mind to produce it and it takes a strong stomach to look at it."
- Lost money
- Was not received well by audiences
- Was pulled by MGM before completing its initial run
- Was repackaged as an exploitation B movie sometimes called 'Nature's Mistakes' or 'Forbidden Love'
- Effectively ended Tod Browning's career
- The film was banned in the UK for 30 years.

"In the UK, the film was refused a certificate altogether. At the time, the only categories available for films were U and A and it was felt that the film exploited for commercial reasons the deformed people that it claimed to dignify. Even the arrival of the H category for horror films later the same year failed to save the film" - **BBFC**

“It was 1952 before *Freaks* reappeared at the BBFC for classification. By then owned by a new distributor, Adelphi Films, the Director of Adelphi, Arthur Dent, wrote to the BBFC pressing the case for allowing the film to be released with an X certificate; in those days, this would have allowed those aged 16 and above to see the film...The decision to reject the film was upheld.” - **BBFC**

- In May 1963, with yet another distributor on board, the film was submitted to the BBFC for the third time.
- The BBFC finally awarded the film an X certificate with the caveat that “people should be warned of the nature of the film so that those to whom such sights are displeasing will not see it.”

### Island of Lost Souls (1932)

Erle C Kenton

- Paramount sponsored a talent competition to find the female ‘star’ of a new production – *Island of Lost Souls*
- There were over 60,000 entrants
- Kathleen C Burke was eventually chosen for the role
- Based on *The Island of Doctor Moreau* by HG Wells
- It’s a horror film in its truest sense in that it leaves the viewer feeling more than a little disturbed
- It’s a pre-code film
- Its surface shocks and horror are still affecting
- Its subtext is perhaps more apparent today
- Anti-Vivisection
- Human/animal experimentation – pre-figuring the age of Nazi scientists and ‘mad’ doctors
- Bestiality/rape
- Torture
- Miscegenation
- Banned in the UK outright, it was also banned in many other territories
- Among the BBFC's objections were references to vivisection and “*cutting a living man to pieces*”, and Dr. Moreau saying “*Do you know what it means to feel like God?*”
- It can be seen as a pre-WW2 form of ‘body horror’
- The film can be seen as being an attack on both organized religion and unchecked scientific ‘progress’
- Moreau’s desire to ‘improve’ animals by making them more like him – can be seen as a negative commentary on the impact of colonialism
- The film might also be seen as being a mix of more intellectual ideas and Hollywood sensationalism

*‘There is an evocative social metaphor here as well: the animals have been given the promise of progress and social elevation. They have dutifully played by their masters incantatory “laws”. And yet it has all been an ugly trick; their elevation is simultaneously a degradation, and a bloody revolt ensues.’* - **David J Skal**

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**Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff**

- Neither actor though was treated with the respect they perhaps deserved
- Lugosi effectively saved Universal Studios from bankruptcy, with his performance in Dracula, yet he was unceremoniously dropped by them just a few years after
- Horror 'stars' of the day were seldom treated seriously and were unable to breakaway from studio typecasting
- Universal though did attempt to cash in on the success of Dracula and Frankenstein by presenting a number of 'two monsters for the price of one' features

**The Black Cat (1934)**

Edgar G Ulmer

- Directed by Edgar G Ulmer
- Produced by Carl Laemmle Jr and E M Asher
- Cinematography by John J. Mescall
- Edited by Ray Curtiss
- Music by Heinz Roemheld
- Screenplay by Peter Ruric
- Karloff's look almost became a template for the 80s goth
- Lugosi is at his most handsome and sympathetic
- It's pretty strong stuff in terms of content – at least for the time, especially what's hinted at, if not shown
- Kidnap
- Torture
- Rape
- Satanic cults and rituals
- Necrophilia
- Skinning alive
- A pre-code film
- An almost continuous musical score
- Shot in just 19 days
- Cost less than \$96,000
- Though pre-code, cuts were made and Lugosi's character was 'softened considerably'
- Though the 'skinning scene' is shown in shadow only – this seems to make it worse – we imagine something stronger

*"He (Ulmer) had a dark side to his character that was unbelievable...it took me a year or two to dig under and find the 'why' of it. You couldn't use the word 'crazy' in his presence, it would petrify him. Like Kafka, he always worked in shadows"* - **Shirley Ulmer**

*"The Black Cat has been called the first psychological horror movie in America. Relentless in its over-the-top morbidity and almost bottomless in its resonating references to war, religion, film, theatre, architecture, psychiatry and classical music..."* - **David J Skal**