

# HORROR



## Genre

Semester Gasal 2021-2022

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# Background & Context

- This genre has its origins in the late nineteenth-century Victorian gothic novel although it does have earlier antecedents, most famously Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), and Dr Polidori's lesser-known *The Vampyre* (1819).
- It is for reasons of its English and European heritage that this genre is not considered a particularly Hollywoodian one (unlike the westerns which are based on and in US history).
- Even so, Hollywood has a long track record with this genre dating back to 1931, in terms of sound movies, like *Dracula* (Tod Browning, 1931) and *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931).



Carl Laemmle

presents

# DRACULA

*The* VAMPIRE THRILLER

TOD BRÖWNING  
Production

with

BELA LUGOSI

DAVID MANNERS

HELEN CHANDLER

DWIGHT FRYE & Edward Van Sloan  
from the famous novel & play by Bram Stoker  
produced by Carl Laemmle Jr.

A UNIVERSAL Picture



**THE THRILL CHILL STORY OF ALL TIME!**  
**IT WILL MAKE YOUR BLOOD  
RUN COLD!**

# FRANKENSTEIN

THE ORIGINAL UNCUT VERSION,  
NEVER SURPASSED!

starring  
*Boris*

**KARLOFF**

*as The MONSTER*

Directed by JAMES WHALE

A  
*Geulart*  
RELEASE



- The vampire film had its heyday in Hollywood during the 1930s.
- The mise-en-scène at that time was influenced by German expressionism – more particularly by the lighting and sets of two German silent horror movies, Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1919) and Friedrich Murnau's *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Terror* (1922).
- After the Second World War the vampire film tended to disappear – being replaced by other sorts of alien 'unnaturalness'.











- Vampire films, however, are not the whole or even the main canon of horror movies.
- Essentially, horror is composed of three major categories: **the ‘unnatural’** (which includes vampires, ghosts, demonology, witchcraft, body horror); **psychological horror** (Psycho, 1960); and **massacre movies** (The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, 1974).



- Horror film did not achieve respectability in critics' circles until the 1970s. This change is the impact of psychoanalysis on film theory.
- The suppression of the id, a repression of certain unspeakable desires (sexual and psychological).
- The monster is repressed in us and not external to us. Our id, our own Other, took the form of an alien or monster outside of us.
- The spectator, beyond the thrill of being frightened by the terror and violence made visible before her or him, is also attracted by the implicit ambivalence inherent in the genre as to where it should locate sexual and psychological 'abnormalities'.



# Categories

- **The Gothic:** Films based on classic tales of horror, often adapting pre-existing horror monsters or horrifying creatures from novels and mythology. (Dracula, Frankenstein).
- **Supernatural, occult and ghost films:** Films that involve interventions of spirits, ghosts, witchcraft, the devil, and other entities into the real world, often featuring uncanny elements. (The Haunting, Rosemary's Baby, Kwaidan, The Exorcist, The Amityville Horror, Suspiria, The Sixth Sense, The Others, Ringu, The Grudge, The Eye, The Blair Witch Project).



- **Psychological horror:** Films that explore psychological states and psychoses, including criminality and serial killers. (Psycho, Peeping Tom, Eyes Without a Face, Repulsion, Carrie, The Hand That Rocks the Cradle, The Silence of the Lambs).
- **Monster movies:** Films that feature invasions of the everyday world by natural and secular creatures leading to death and destruction. (Godzilla, The Birds, The Thing from Another World, Alien, The Host, Cloverfield).



- **Slashers:** Films portraying groups of teenagers menaced by a stalker, set in domestic and suburban spaces frequented by youngpeople, the only survivor a female who (in the early cycles) has not participated in underage sex. (The Texas Chain Saw Massacre, Halloween, Friday the 13th, A Nightmare on Elm Street).
- **Body horror, splatter and gore films** (including postmodern zombies): Films that explore abjection and disgust of the human body, often involving mutation, disease, or aberrant and fetishistic behaviour (for example cannibalism or sado-masochism). (The Fly, The Thing, Night of the Living Dead, Evil Dead, Dawn of the Dead, Resident Evil).
- **Exploitation cinema, video nasties or other forms of explicitly violent films:** Films focused on extreme or taboo subjects, including violence and torture, other controversial subject matter such as Nazi death camps, rape and other sexual assaults upon women. (Hostel, Saw, Audition, Ichi the Killer, The Devil's Rejects, Irréversible).



# Convention

- The central character is a victim, rather than a hero.
- The antagonist is often manifested from a technological aberration (such as Frankenstein's monster) or a social aberration (such as Freddy Krueger).
- Unbridled aggression and sexuality play an important role. Cruelty knows no relative form; this is a genre of absolutes.
- Technology, science, and scientific activity often unleash the antagonist. Fears about the future are as important as are our fears about the past.
- Religion is viewed as an intermediary that can influence the outcome of events. The central conflict is often portrayed as a struggle between God and Satan (such as in *The Exorcist*, *Rosemary's Baby* , and *The Seventh Sign*).



- Children have special powers in this genre. Children exhibit vision, insight, and tolerance; adults exhibit the opposite traits.
- Relationships can't save the central character. Very often, the victimizer is a member of the family.
- The location (such as the house, village, and archaeological find) has a special significance that influences the outcome of events for the central character.
- The supernatural has a significant role in the horror film genre; most events can't be explained rationally. As the genre dwells on the irrational, some form of understanding devolves from a supernatural explanation.







- Large number of national horror cinemas can be considered. These have developed styles and varieties of their own based on their particular cultural histories.
- The function of horror – to scare, shock, revolt or otherwise horrify the viewer – also means that filmmakers are constantly pushing at the boundaries in order to invent new ways of arousing these emotions in their audiences and thus keep the scares coming.
- In all these ways, notions of what the horror genre might be – or should be – are constantly shifting, creating new conceptual categories in order to keep on scaring the audience.



