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| Browning, Tod (Charles Albert Browning, Jr.) (1880-1962) |
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| After running away from his Louisville, Kentucky home at age 16 to join the circus, Tod Browning pursued a Hollywood career, first as an actor, and then, following a tragic auto accident, as a director. A filmmaker who made the transition from silent era to sound films, Browning, the so-called ‘Poe of the Cinema,’ created horror films simultaneously exploiting and sympathizing with physically non-normative or disfigured characters, showing the lasting influence of his foundational years in the circus. Browning worked with the most important stars in the horror genre, including Bela Lugosi — who appeared in his 1931 Universal feature *Dracula* — and Lon Chaney*,* with whom Browning partnered for a number of films, including *The Wicked Darling* (1919), the circus-themed *The Unholy Three* (1925), and *The Unknown* (1927). Most famous among Browning’s films is *Freaks* (1932), which remains controversial to this day. Whether or not the film ultimately sympathizes with the actual sideshow freaks Browning employed for the film is a matter of debate — the famous line, ‘one of us,’ which the freaks chant at the marriage ceremony of a wealthy midget and a scheming big woman, may be heard as either a threat (they ultimately mutilate this cruel woman) or as an invitation into their community. The controversy surrounding the film effectively ended Browning’s career. |
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| Further reading:  (Hawkins)  (Herzogenrath)  (Skal and Savada)  (Browning)  (Browning, The Devil Doll [Trailer]) |