Browning, Tod (Charles Albert Browning, Jr.) (1880-1962)

After running away from his Louisville, Kentucky home at age 16 to join the circus, Browning pursued a Hollywood career, first as an actor, and then, after a tragic auto accident, as a director. A filmmaker who made the transition from silent era to sound films, the “Poe of the Cinema” created horror films that simultaneously exploit and sympathize with characters with non-normative bodies, showing the lasting influence of his time 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 to their community. The controversy surrounding the film effectively ended Browning’s career.

List of Works:

Browning made over sixty films; this list of works is necessarily partial.

*Outside the Law* (1920)

*The Unholy Th*ree (1925)

*London after Midnight* (1927)

*The Unknown (*1927)

*Dracula* (1931)

*Freaks* (1932)

*Mark of the Vampire* (1935)

*The Devil-Doll* (1936)

References and Further Reading:

Hawkins, J. (1996) '“One of Us”: Tod Browning's Freaks*.’ Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*. ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson. New York: New York University Press: 265-76.

Herzogenrath, B. (ed.) (2008) *The Cinema of Tod Browning: Essays of the Macabre and Grotesque.* Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

Skal, D. and Savada, E. (1995) *Dark Carnival: The Secret World of Tod Browning*. New York: Anchor Books.

Paratextual Materials: (The are both taken from the internet archive, which houses material that is no longer under copyright.)

The full-length version of *Freaks* is available here:

<http://archive.org/details/freaks1932>

If you’d like something a bit briefer, this is a link to the trailer for another of Browning’s films, *The Devil Doll*

[*http://archive.org/details/TheDevilDoll-Trailer*](http://archive.org/details/TheDevilDoll-Trailer)