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EDITION

A History *of* Horror

WHEELER WINSTON DIXON



"A deft and knowledgeable guide."
—*Times Literary Supplement*

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For Dana Miller, who made it through the night

I have found it! What terrified me will terrify others; and I need only describe the specter which had haunted my midnight pillow.

—Mary Shelley, Preface to *Frankenstein*

Where there is no imagination, there is no horror.

—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

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In creating this book, I have been most crucially assisted by Dana Miller, my typist for more than forty years and, in many respects, a guiding force behind all my books; Dennis Coleman, whose vast knowledge of the cinema is a source of wonder; and many other friends and colleagues. Of course, my most sincere thanks also go to the staff at Rutgers University Press who made the publication of this book possible, especially Leslie Mitchner, who commissioned the first edition, and Nicole Solano and Micah Kleit, who commissioned this new edition. Most of the stills that grace this volume are from the Jerry Ohlinger Archive; other stills are from Photofest. Linda Lotz copyedited the revisions for the second

edition, and Jennifer Holan provided the index; my sincere thanks to both. Clay Lewis was an enormous help in preparing the printing materials for this volume. And, of course, I thank most of all Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, my wife and lifetime partner, to whom I owe a literally incalculable debt.

This text is organized in roughly chronological order, but of necessity there is considerable overlap, particularly in the case of franchise films, which can easily start in one era and continue through multiple iterations for several decades. Then, too, the years in the chapter headings are approximate; there are always outliers in any genre, films that defy the established values of a given time frame. And yet these periods—in which the basic precepts of the horror film were established, then burnished into conveniently reliable and malleable forms, and finally, after collapsing into parody, rose again and again to create new levels of intensity and menace—form the basic template of the history of the horror film not only in the United States but also throughout the world.

Certainly, no volume that deals with the entire field of horror films on a worldwide basis can be comprehensive, nor is it my intention to attempt that task. Beyond the classic monsters discussed in the first chapters, many new waves of horror have appeared in succeeding decades, moving from Universal's classic horror films to Hammer Films in England, the splatter films of the 1970s, and other new genres as filmmaking became cheaper and distribution more accessible. As horror films morphed into new and more explicit forms in the last decades of the twentieth century and beyond, most of the original conceptions of what constitutes a horror film were turned on their head as social, political, and racial issues were explored in a series of films that went well beyond the conventional boundaries of the genre. New horror icons—Pinhead from the *Hellraiser* series; Michael Myers, the indestructible killer from the *Halloween* films; Freddie Krueger in the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series; Jason Voorhees from the *Friday the 13th* films; Jigsaw, the mysterious and violent avenger in the *Saw* franchise; and Leatherface, the chainsaw-wielding maniac from the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* series, to name just a few—have come to dominate the new wave of horror films.

There are an astounding number of films to consider, and I couldn't possibly touch on all of them. In considering which films to focus on, I

chose the most representative examples of the genre, so if your favorite film or actor is missing in action, it is only for reasons of space or continuity. What you will find in this volume are the key films that defined the genre in the early years of the twentieth century and continue to influence horror films of the present day. I trace the various permutations of the themes and iconic structures developed in these original films through a multiplicity of social and political landscapes into the twenty-first century. Where this will ultimately lead is anyone's guess, but here I offer a detailed outline of the horror film's past, as well as some clues to its direction in the future.

A History of Horror

CHAPTER 1

Origins

1896–1929

BEFORE THERE WERE horror movies, there were written or spoken horror narratives, fables handed down from one generation to the next, and, as we shall see, theatrical presentations designed to thrill and horrify audiences. The origins of the horror story may be traced to the beginning of narrative itself, or at least as far back as the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* (circa 2000 B.C.) and Homer's *Odyssey* (circa 800 B.C.), both of which involve a variety of contests between mortals and monsters with a strong otherworldly flavor, in which man is but a tool, or pawn, of the gods. Dante's *The Divine Comedy* (1310) has served as the template for a series of terrifying visions of eternal damnation, as we shall see, and stories of lycanthropy can be traced to the Middle Ages, especially in French folk tales. Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus* (1590), along with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's two-part poem *Faust* (1808 and 1833), also proved fertile ground for filmmakers from the late nineteenth century onward, chronicling the tale of a man who sells his soul to Satan in return for illimitable wisdom and power, only to be (perhaps inevitably) disappointed by the transaction. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) is generally considered the first horror novel, and the work of Gothicism Ann Radcliffe, whose most successful foray into the genre was undoubtedly *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), was also popular with audiences. M. G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1795) was an even more horrific novel, and Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) chronicles another ill-advised pact with Satan.

Most famous of all these early works is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), which was created as the result of a bet of sorts by Lord Byron, who, ensconced in his summer house on Lake

Genève in 1816 with Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Polidori, Mary Godwin, and Claire Clairmont in attendance, proposed that he and his friends should try their hand at writing ghost stories to pass the time—the weather was cold and rainy, and created the proper mood for such an enterprise. Shelley and Clairmont ignored the suggestion; Byron himself started a short story and then abandoned it. But Mary Godwin (she was at this point Shelley's mistress and not actually betrothed to the poet) sat down and attacked the task with vigor and imagination—no small feat for an eighteen-year-old who had never written anything nearly as ambitious in her short life. When it was published in 1818, the novel became a sensation, and it has served, as everyone knows, as the basis for literally thousands of films, of all nationalities, from the dawn of cinema to the present.

For his part, John Polidori took Byron's fragment and expanded it into *The Vampyre: A Tale* (1819), imagining an aristocratic vampire as a figure of heterosexual erotic desire, a concept that would remain unexplored by the cinema, amazingly, until Terence Fisher's *Dracula* (1958; *Horror of Dracula* in the United States) made an overnight star of Christopher Lee as the bloodthirsty count. In addition, James Malcolm Rymer's serial *Varney the Vampyre*, which ran from 1845 to 1847, consisted of lurid tales told with penny-dreadful relish and the requisite amount of gore, suitably illustrated with blood-drenched engravings of Varney attacking a seemingly endless series of nubile victims.

Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) exhibited literary ambition of a much higher level, but it too had to wait nearly a century for its most inspired cinematic adaptation, Roger Vadim's hallucinatory *Et mourir de plaisir* (*Blood and Roses*, 1960), which fully exploited the lesbian theme of Le Fanu's source text. Victor Hugo's 1831 novel *Notre Dame de Paris* became the basis for Alice Guy Blaché's film *La Esmeralda* (1905); Guy also directed a twenty-two-part sound version (with sound and music recorded on wax cylinders in synchronization with the images) of Goethe's *Faust* in 1905–1906.

In the mid- to late 1800s such disparate authors as Nikolai Gogol, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and, most notably, the tormented Edgar Allan Poe would all put their own stamp on tales of the weird and supernatural, with Poe, especially, embracing the short story format as the ideal vehicle for his tales of the macabre, such as "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) and "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843). Robert Louis

Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and *The Body Snatcher* (1885) further expanded the horizons of the horror genre. Wilkie Collins created the superb Gothic mysteries *The Woman in White* (1860) and *The Moonstone* (1868), and Oscar Wilde brought *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to life in 1890, in which a man's portrait ages while its subject remains eternally young.

Indeed, as one can see from this brief survey of supernatural literature, nearly all of the major thematic constructs that still fascinate us today—the man-made monster, the vampire, the pact with the Devil—date from this early period of experimentation. By the time Bram Stoker published *Dracula* in 1897 and the modern serial killer was embodied by Jack the Ripper, whose string of vicious murders began in August 1888 and ended with no clear resolution in 1889, most of the major themes of cinematic horror were fully formed.

In addition, Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), one of literature's greatest ghost stories (superbly filmed in 1961 by director Jack Clayton as *The Innocents*) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's feminist psychological horror story *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1899), in which a young woman is suffocated by the constraints of Victorian patriarchy and goes mad, also had a considerable influence on the development of the classic horror narrative. Short story writer W.W. Jacobs contributed "The Monkey's Paw" (1902), in which three wishes bring misfortune on a family that discovers too late the dreadful truth to the adage, "Be careful what you wish for."

Similarly, the horror film has been a cinematic staple since the inception of the medium. Thomas Edison, that most exploitative of entrepreneurs, produced the first filmic version of *Frankenstein*, directed by J. Searle Dawley, in 1910, but that film was preceded by a series of equally blood-thirsty entertainments, including the bizarre *Electrocuting an Elephant* (1903) and *The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots* (1895), the first an authentic "snuff" film depicting the execution of a "rogue" circus elephant, and the latter a lip-smacking vignette depicting Mary Stuart's death by the ax. Indeed, the cinema was made to order for horror, bringing the various special effects, tricks, and prosthetic makeup devices used in theatrical presentations—such as the Grand Guignol in Paris—to a considerably larger audience.

Georges Méliès, too, dealt in the grotesque and the fantastic in his films from 1896 onward, most famously with *Le manoir du diable*

(*The Devil's Manor*, 1896), in which the director himself played a Mephistophelean vampire in a two-minute short often cited as the first true horror film. Méliès returned to the short in his 1898 *La caverne maudite* (*The Cave of the Demons*). Japanese filmmakers also created early, extremely short horror films, such as *Bake Jizo* (*Jizo the Spook*) and *Shinin no sosei* (*Resurrection of a Corpse*; both 1898, directors unknown).

Alice Guy Blaché, one of the true pioneers of the cinema, adapted Edgar Allan Poe's *The Pit and the Pendulum* into a thirty-minute "epic" in 1913, making a film much longer than most others of this era from Poe's slight tale of torture during the Inquisition. The extremely rare film *Le spectre rouge* (*The Red Spectre*, 1907), which for years lacked precise directorial attribution, has recently been identified as the work of the prolific Ferdinand Zecca and his scenarist, Segundo de Chomón; in its nine-minute running time it presents a series of phantasmagorical illusions involving a conjuring devil who levitates several women, shrinks them to doll size, and imprisons them in a series of glass bottles. Hand-tinted in lurid shades of red, *Le spectre rouge* is at once an item of morbid curiosity and a tour de force of trick cinematography.

Thomas Edison's 1910 version of *Frankenstein* was an ambitious affair for the period, with a viewing time of sixteen minutes, and featured Charles Ogle as the monster and Augustus Phillips as Frankenstein. Although the film's length allowed for only the briefest sketch of Mary Shelley's novel, the sequence in which Frankenstein brings his creation to life still exudes an eerie sense of the unknown, and, as with *The Red Spectre*, the film is suitably hand-colored in sepulchral hues of red, blue, and purple. Five years after that, the American director Joseph W. Smiley made the oddly titled *Life Without Soul*, a five-reel 1915 production of *Frankenstein*. Despite the sensationalistic subject matter and the novel's notoriety, the film was a commercial and critical failure, even after extensive recutting with additional "scientific footage." In Italy, Eugenio Testa directed yet another version of the Frankenstein saga, *Il mostro di Frankenstein* (*The Monster of Frankenstein*, 1921), running nearly four reels, or forty minutes.

Other "origin" films from the primitive days of the genre include Méliès's *Une nuit terrible* (*A Terrible Night*, 1896), in which a man is menaced by a giant beetle; Méliès's *L'auberge ensorcelée* (*The Bewitched Inn*, 1897), a brief vignette of a traveler trying to sleep while his clothing



1. The 1910 *Frankenstein*, Charles Ogle as the monster. Courtesy: Jerry Ohlinger Archive.

takes on a life of its own; George Albert Smith's *Photographing a Ghost*, an 1898 film in which a frustrated photographer attempts to "capture" a ghost on film; and Méliès's *La colonne de feu* (*The Column of Fire*; aka *Haggard's She: The Pillar of Fire*, 1899), a one-minute film that depicts the final scene in Sir H. Rider Haggard's novel *She*, in which the queen of a lost civilization gains immortality by stepping into a sacred fire (compare this to Robert Day's 1965 version of *She*, with Ursula Andress, or Irving Pichel and Lansing Holden's 1935 version—Méliès was once again way ahead of his time).

Films of the bizarre and curious remained popular during the formative years of the cinema, including Walter R. Booth's short film *The Haunted Curiosity Shop* (1901), in which the proprietor of an antique

shop is confronted by a mysterious skull; Méliès's most famous film, the science-fiction/horror genre-bending *Le voyage dans la lune* (*A Trip to the Moon*, 1902), with its grotesque moon creatures, which can be dispatched into a puff of smoke with a whack of a well-aimed umbrella; and Alf Collins's bizarre *The Electric Goose* (1905), in which a goose is brought back to life, in a classical "mad lab" manner, with electrical apparatus. All of these films attested to the public's fascination with the unusual. Abel Gance, who would direct the epic film *Napoleon* in 1927, created *La folie du Docteur Tube* (*The Madness of Dr. Tube*) in 1915, shot in an abstract fashion with fragmented visuals, as a mad scientist's attempts to alter the nature of light go spectacularly awry.

Otis Turner's 1908 American version of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was the first film version of Robert Louis Stevenson's novel, a thirteen-minute adaptation of a London stage play originally starring Richard Mansfield, with a young Hobart Bosworth as leading man. Viggo Larsen's Danish film *Den graa dame* (*The Grey Lady*, 1909), a Sherlock Holmes mystery, involves a mysterious ghost woman and a series of unexplained murders. A 1912 version of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* directed by Lucius Henderson starred future director James Cruze in the title role. The lurid *Conscience* (1912), a Vitagraph film directed by and starring Maurice Costello, featured a complex plot involving a chamber of horrors that drives a young man to death by fright and his wife into incurable insanity. And Luigi Maggi's Italian film *Satana* (*Satan*, 1912), adapted from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, was a forty-minute spectacle that dwarfed many contemporary productions in size and scope.

Maurice Tourneur created the French production of *Le système du docteur Goudron et du professeur Plume* (*The Lunatics*), a 1913 horror film based on Poe's short story "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether," which would be remade in Mexico in 1973 as *La mansión de la locura* (*Mansion of Madness*, aka *Dr. Tarr's Torture Dungeon*) by director Juan López Moctezuma, with large quantities of sex and violence added to the project. In Germany, actor/director Paul Wegener seemed obsessed with the Jewish folklore figure of *The Golem*, co-directing a sixty-minute feature version with Henrik Galeen in 1915, then co-directing a sequel with Rochus Gliese, *Der Golem und die Tänzerin* (*The Golem and the Dancing Girl*), in 1917 and finally co-directing with Carl Boese *Der Golem, wie er in die Welt kam* (*The Golem: How He Came*



2. Paul Wegener in the 1920 version of *The Golem*. Courtesy: Jerry Ohlinger Archive.

into the World) in 1920. Wegener played the leading role in all three, but only the 1920 version survives.

Even more unusual is the 1913 production of *The Werewolf*, directed by Henry MacRae, who would go on to a long career as a director in both the silent and the sound eras, including his co-direction of Universal's *Flash Gordon* serials in the late 1930s, with a script by feminist filmmaker Ruth Ann Baldwin. Shot on location in Canada and running

eighteen minutes, *The Werewolf* tells the story of a young Navajo woman, Watuma (Phyllis Gordon), who is taught by her vengeful mother to hate all white men and turns into a wolf to attack them when they threaten her hearth and home. Generally considered the first cinematic telling of the werewolf legend, the film was unfortunately destroyed in a fire in 1924, and only secondhand accounts of its existence remain.

The screen had to wait for a definitive interpretation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* until F.W. Murnau directed the first version, *Nosferatu* (1922)—but Murnau made the film without bothering to get permission from Stoker's estate. This moody, expressionistic vision of the classic vampire tale (employing negative images spliced directly into the positive print for an otherworldly effect, stop-motion photography to speed up the action, and other trick effects) was anchored by the mesmeric performance of Max Schreck in the leading role, and for many, for sheer atmosphere and visual brilliance, it has never been equaled.

When Stoker's widow discovered the existence of Murnau's unauthorized version, she demanded that all prints of the film be destroyed, along with the master negative. Thankfully, this never came to pass, as enough fugitive negatives and prints survived to ensure the film's continued existence, and now, fully restored, the film is readily available on DVD. *Nosferatu* is one of the few truly accessible horror films of the period, along with Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), a masterpiece of German Expressionist horror and paranoia centering on a somnambulist murderer named Cesare (Conrad Veidt), who, under the direction of the sinister Dr. Caligari (Werner Krauss), commits a series of brutal murders in a small town. The grisly plot may or may not exist only in the imagination of the film's narrator, who is ultimately revealed to be an inmate of an insane asylum—an asylum run by Dr. Caligari himself. The script of *Caligari* was partially the work of future director Fritz Lang, who devised the film's famous unresolved ending.

Gaston Leroux's novel *The Phantom of the Opera* (1911) was adapted to the screen by Rupert Julian in 1925, with Lon Chaney Sr. in the title role; the "Man of 1,000 Faces" created a bravura performance that to this day remains unrivaled. Other writers, such as H. G. Wells, produced a mixture of horror and science-fiction novels along with other, more conventional works, such as *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), which first came to the screen in Erle C. Kenton's superb *Island of Lost Souls* (1932),



3. Conrad Veidt in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. Courtesy: Jerry Ohlinger Archive.

with Charles Laughton as a mad scientist intent on transforming jungle animals into humanoid hybrids in his laboratory, known to the island's inhabitants as "The House of Pain." Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was filmed numerous times in the early years of the cinema, appearing in silent versions in 1913, 1915, 1916, and 1917; since then, the tale has gone through numerous additional adaptations.

Perhaps the most influential Gothic writer of the twentieth century, though he reaped little reward for his efforts within his own lifetime, was Howard Phillips (H. P.) Lovecraft, who wrote for the “pulp” magazines of the 1920s and ’30s, lived a life of penury, and died in obscurity in 1937. His many works, such as his novella *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* (1927), adapted, finally, by Roger Corman as *The Haunted Palace* in 1963 (with the title of a Poe poem tacked on as a sales gimmick), and his grisly serial *Herbert West: Reanimator* (1922), which reached the screen in near-parody form in Stuart Gordon’s over-the-top *Re-Animator* (1985), and which Lovecraft originally wrote for the pulp magazine *Home Brew* for the astonishingly low fee of \$5 per episode, or a total of \$30 for six episodes, show him to be one of the most original horror writers of his era.

During this same period, film serials became popular, with a chapter being shown each week to enthralled audiences, each with a “cliffhanger” ending to keep the audience coming back for more. One of the more sensationalistic examples was T. Hayes Hunter’s *The Crimson Stain Mystery* (1916), a sixteen-chapter serial detailing the efforts of mad scientist Dr. Burton Montrose (Thomas J. McGrane) to create a master race; his experiments spawn abominable mutant beings that declare war on the society that rejects them with a wave of criminal activity. Louis Feuillade’s *Les vampires* (*The Vampires*, 1915) is perhaps the most famous and influential serial of the era, with nine chapters, each running roughly three reels in length. Feuillade not only directed the film, but also wrote the serial’s convoluted scenario, which chronicles the exploits of a group of daring criminals who employ a vast array of electronic devices to aid in their nefarious enterprises.

Bertram Bracken’s 1917 *Conscience* was loosely based on John Milton’s epic poem *Paradise Lost*, while Cecil B. DeMille’s 1917 feature *The Devil-Stone* was a full-blown melodrama from a story by Beatrice DeMille and Leighton Osmun, dealing with a brilliant emerald, coveted by many, which has been cursed by Satan himself. In 1915 stop-motion model animator Willis O’Brien, who would bring his classic character *King Kong* to the screen in 1933, produced and directed *The Dinosaur and the Missing Link* for Thomas Edison. In the film, which many consider a dry run for his later, more celebrated creation, O’Brien began his life-long obsession with stop-motion models and miniatures, creating one of

the cinema's first explorations—albeit a highly fanciful one—into the origins of man. Even Ernst Lubitsch, who would later become internationally celebrated for his sparkling sex comedies, tried his hand at a horror film during this period, the curious *Die Augen der Mumie Ma* (*The Eyes of the Mummy*, 1918), with Emil Jannings and Pola Negri.

Fred Niblo's *The Haunted Bedroom* (1919) details the adventures of reporter Betsy Thorne (Enid Bennett) as she investigates mysterious happenings at a haunted estate. Erich Kober's German film *Lilith und Ly* (*Lilith and Ly*, 1919), with a screenplay by Fritz Lang, concerns itself with a statue that comes to life through the power of a magical jewel. Conrad Veidt's aptly titled *Wahnsinn* (*Madness*, 1919), produced and directed by and starring Veidt, centers on a prosperous banker whose life comes apart after an unfortunate encounter with a fortune teller. Director Richard Oswald's German film *Unheimliche Geschichten* (*Tales of the Uncanny*, 1919) was one of the first "omnibus" horror films, a format that persists to the present day, in which a group of short tales of horror and suspense is woven into a feature-length film. Once again, the star is Conrad Veidt, who was rapidly becoming a central figure in the horror genre, years before he portrayed the sinister Major Strasser in Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca* (1942).

John S. Robertson's adaptation of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1920) was highlighted by matinee idol John Barrymore's intense interpretation of the title role and thankfully still survives. In the same year, producer Louis Meyer (no connection with Louis B. Mayer) rushed into production his own version of Stevenson's classic tale, directed by J. Charles Haydon and with Sheldon Lewis in the title role. This cheapjack affair in no way approaches the power or artistry of the Robertson version, which was almost universally acclaimed as a cinematic masterpiece, due in large part to Barrymore's performance. Barrymore was appearing on Broadway in Shakespeare's *Richard III* at the time, shooting the film during the day and then being whisked off to the theater for an equally demanding role each night. The strain was eventually too much for the actor, who collapsed from a nervous breakdown at thirty-eight years of age.

Meanwhile, in Hollywood, Lon Chaney Sr. was poised to become a major horror film star, consolidating a long apprenticeship in the cinema with George Loane Tucker's *The Miracle Man* (1919), from a play by song-and-dance man George M. Cohan, in which Chaney Sr. appeared

as a supposedly crippled man who is miraculously “cured” by an unscrupulous “healer.” Chaney had been kicking around in silent films since 1913 after a hardscrabble childhood, in which his deaf parents taught him to communicate with them through the use of facial expressions and pantomime, skills that stood him in good stead in the world of the silent cinema. After several years on the road in musical comedy roles, Chaney quit the stage and made the trip to Hollywood, where he rapidly rose in the movie business due to his nearly incomparable skill with makeup, leading to his famous sobriquet, “The Man of 1,000 Faces.”

By 1915 Chaney was so much in demand that he was directing and starring in films for Universal—he directed six films in that year alone. His real success came with such films as Wallace Worsley’s *The Penalty* (1920), based on Gouverneur Morris’s short story, which, although nominally a crime melodrama, gave Chaney ample range to display his talents as a makeup virtuoso in the role of a master criminal whose legs are amputated, leading him to seek vengeance on society at large. But all this activity was just the curtain raiser for Chaney, whose talents would fully blossom in such films as Worsley’s *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923), Roland West’s *The Monster* (1925), in which Chaney played an archetypal mad scientist, and, perhaps most famously, Rupert Julian’s version of *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925), which instantly became Chaney’s signature role. It was followed by Tod Browning’s *The Unholy Three* (1925), another crime drama, in which a gang of three bizarre crooks—a strongman, Hercules (Victor McLaglen), a dwarf, Tweedledee (Harry Earles), and their leader, the ventriloquist Echo (Chaney)—wage a campaign of terror and deceit against conventional society.

Sadly, Chaney’s career had by then reached its climax; in the now lost feature film *London after Midnight* (1927), directed by Tod Browning, Chaney appeared in one of his most impressive makeup designs as a *faux* vampire, but with the transition to sound films, which Chaney resisted, his star began to wane. Chaney’s last film was a sound remake of *The Unholy Three* in 1930, directed by Jack Conway, which thankfully survives and suggests that, despite his personal misgivings, Chaney would easily have made the transition to the new medium. In the 1930 version of *The Unholy Three*, as in the original, Chaney appears much of the time in drag disguise and adopts a distinctly “feminine” voice, only to be tricked at the end of the film into revealing his true gender in a



4. Lon Chaney in Tod Browning's lost film, *London after Midnight*. Courtesy: Jerry Ohlinger Archive.

courtroom witness box, as prosecutor John Miljan extracts a confession from him through trickery and surprise tactics. The scene works much more effectively in the sound version than in the silent one, for obvious reasons, and Chaney pulls off the aural and visual masquerade brilliantly.

But during the filming, Chaney's throat began to bother him, and although he completed the production, it would be his last work. Only one month after the completion of the 1930 version of *The Unholy Three*, Chaney died of bronchial cancer at the age of forty-eight. He left behind a son, Creighton Tull Chaney, who would abandon his early