



The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror; Revised Edition with a New Afterword

By David J. Skal

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Illuminating the dark side of the American century, *The Monster Show* uncovers the surprising links between horror entertainment and the great social crises of our time, as well as horror's function as a pop analogue to surrealism and other artistic movements.

With penetrating analyses and revealing anecdotes, David J. Skal chronicles one of our most popular and pervasive modes of cultural expression. He explores the disguised form in which Hollywood's classic horror movies played out the traumas of two world wars and the Depression; the nightmare visions of invasion and mind control catalyzed by the Cold War; the preoccupation with demon children that took hold as thalidomide, birth control, and abortion changed the reproductive landscape; the vogue in visceral, transformative special effects that paralleled the development of the plastic surgery industry; the link between the AIDS epidemic and the current fascination with vampires; and much more. Now with a new Afterword by the author that looks at horror's popular renaissance in the last decade, *The Monster Show* is a compulsively readable, thought-provoking inquiry into America's obsession with the macabre.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

This study of the visual horror genre from Dr. Caligari to Dr. Hannibal Lecter starts with a discussion of Diane Arbus's photographs of freaks. David Skal then suggests that he will seek to "explain why the images resonated in the culture ... [and] why so much of our imaginative life in the 20th century has been devoted to peeling back the masks and scabs of civilization, to finding, cultivating, and projecting nightmare images of the secret self." Whether or not you agree with his thesis that horror is a symptom of society's ills (war, disease, poverty), you will find much of value in this thorough, highly readable history--especially the detailed accounts of the work of filmmaker Tod Browning, and of how *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* made their way from books to plays to films. The book is handsomely designed (hardcover has dust jacket by Edward Gorey), with illustrations, footnotes, and index.

From Publishers Weekly

This entertaining survey mixes behind-the-scenes Hollywood anecdotes with intriguing social analysis. Skal (*Hollywood Gothic*) considers the archetypes depicted in *Dracula* , *Frankenstein* , *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and Tod Browning's *Freaks* as responses to the Great Depression that contained metaphors of class warfare. Scientific sadism in films of the 1940s drew on partial knowledge of the Third Reich, he argues, while movie monsters of the '50s personified Bomb-bred mutants or Cold War brainwashers. Skal links 1960s films' anxiety about sex and reproduction to the introduction of the Pill and Thalidomide, and suggests that horror flicks of the '70s and '80s show signs of the post-traumatic stress syndrome suffered by many Vietnam veterans. Though he analyzes Stephen King's novels, Michael Jackson's "Thriller" video and *Famous Monsters* magazine, his book might have been richer had he delved into more non-Hollywood aspects of pop culture, such as heavy metal music. Illustrations not seen by PW.

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From Library Journal

Skal, author of a terrific history of the *Dracula* subgenre, *Hollywood Gothic: The Tangled Web of "Dracula" from Novel to Stage to Screen* (LJ 9/15/90), offers an incisive analysis of the (mostly) American horror film. He demonstrates how historical, social, and political factors influenced (and were influenced by) Hollywood's production of this changing but almost always popular genre. Skal ventures from Tod Browning's "mutilation allegories" of the post-World War I 1920s, to the early archetypes of the 1930s (*Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, and the one-of-a-kind movie *Freaks*), to the mid-1950s, and on to the AIDS metaphors in today's sex-and-splatter films. Skal also includes fresh production information and trivia. *The Monster Show* is much better than Walter Kendrick's recent *The Thrill of Fear* (Grove Pr., 1991), which deals more with literature than film. This sharply written, thoroughly researched, and unflaggingly compelling book is the best "serious" nonsurvey of the genre to date. For all cinema collections.

- *David Bartholomew, NYPL*

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Users Review

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Cindi Russell:

As people who live in typically the modest era should be up-date about what going on or facts even knowledge to make these people keep up with the era that is certainly always change and progress. Some of

you maybe will update themselves by studying books. It is a good choice in your case but the problems coming to a person is you don't know which you should start with. This *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror; Revised Edition with a New Afterword* is our recommendation to help you keep up with the world. Why, because book serves what you want and wish in this era.

Paul Moore:

Reading a reserve tends to be new life style in this particular era globalization. With reading through you can get a lot of information which will give you benefit in your life. With book everyone in this world could share their idea. Guides can also inspire a lot of people. Lots of author can inspire all their reader with their story as well as their experience. Not only situation that share in the books. But also they write about the ability about something that you need example. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your kids, there are many kinds of book that you can get now. The authors these days always try to improve their talent in writing, they also doing some exploration before they write on their book. One of them is this *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror; Revised Edition with a New Afterword*.

Ann McLemore:

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Jason Davis:

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