
Morality and the Movies Week 2.

Andrew Graves

'H' For Horrific Certificate

“The H certificate was introduced by the British Board of Film Censors in 1932 and was specifically designed to cover American horror films that followed in the wake of *Dracula* (1931, US, d. Tod Browning) and *Frankenstein* (1931, US, d. James Whale)...the death of a little girl at the hands of Frankenstein's monster led the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children to complain to the Home Office that the BBFC was being insufficiently vigilant.”

“The BBFC's response was a certificate designed to highlight films featuring frightening or disturbing scenes, called 'H' (for 'Horror'). Although the BBFC intended the H certificate to be advisory, in practice many local authorities used it as an excuse to exclude all children under sixteen.”

<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/592632/>

The Post War Period and the Evolving British Horror Movie

The Halfway House (1944)

- Directed by Basil Deardon
- Written by Angus McPhail and Diana Morgan
- Based on the play *The Peaceful Inn* by Denis Ogden
- Produced by Michael Balcon
- Cinematography by Wilkie Cooper
- Edited by Charles Hasse
- Music by Lord Berners
- *The Halfway House* helped to establish a new kind of British 'horror' film
- Its ability to weave in family drama, supernatural activity and time anomalies essentially set the tone for many British off-kilter thrillers
- It also acted as a precursor to another Basil Deardon project

Dead of Night (1945)

Directed by Alberto Calvacanti, Basil Deardon, Robert Hamer and Charles Crichton

- Was arguably the first 'true' British horror film
- Was the one of the first to employ the portmanteau format – later copied by Amicus
- Genuinely creepy
- Highly original
- A well-polished nightmare

Dead of Night (1945)**Sequences**

- Hearse Driver Sequence
- Christmas Party Sequence
- Haunted Mirror Sequence
- The Golfer Story Sequence
- The Ventriloquist's Dummy Sequence
- The linking narrative gives a cyclical 'nightmarish' quality to the presentation of the story

The Linking Narrative

- Architect Walter Craig is invited to the home of Elliot Foley to discuss renovations
- When he gets there, he is convinced he has seen the guests at the house before in a recurring dream
- Several guests relate their own stories which have supernatural overtones – these form the 'segments' of the narrative
- The whole film ends in a nightmare
- Walter wakes up in his bed but then the phone rings
- It's Elliot Foley inviting him over to the house...

"The film has haunted me since I first saw it just after my 12th birthday, and with each viewing something new is revealed in the stories...Though there is universal agreement that Michael Redgrave's schizophrenic ventriloquist is the film's most compelling invention, I now value each story, both for itself and for its contribution to the cumulative impact. The merging of dreaming and reality is what becomes truly terrifying." - **Phillip French**

"Dead of Night is a remarkable and in some ways prophetic film...(it) is actively frightening in a way few British films have managed before or since." - **David Pirie**

The Quatermass Experiment (1953)

"Kneale's success with the scripting lay in his rejection of the self-imposed constraints of televisual drama, most obviously, the overt theatricality of many early BBC productions. Instead he delivered a strong, fast-paced and intelligent drama which, crucially and unusually, was created specifically for television." - **The BFI**

The Quatermass Xperiment (1955)

- The first of Hammer's monster films
- The transformation – seems to take place before our eyes – not off screen
- Phil Leakey's make-up
- Was Hammer – literally 'staking' its claim in the British Film Industry

"Perhaps the most astonishing thing about the film is how decisively the opening sequence seems to record the intrusion of Hammer into the cosy middle class domesticity of the British Cinema." - **David Pirie**

The Quatermass Xperiment (1955)

- A simpering couple (perhaps representative of the 'coyness' embedded within most British productions) giggle and embrace
- They are interrupted by a crashing/deafening noise
- They seek shelter, when the noise has gone a huge spacecraft is lodged into the countryside setting.

"...looks less like an aircraft than some surreal prolonged phallus...It would be difficult to conceive of a more symbolic or appropriate beginning for Hammer's eruption into the British film scene in the late fifties." - **David Pirie**

The Curse of Frankenstein (1956)

"This is infinitely more disgusting than the first script...in fact, really evil" - **Audrey Field (BBCF)**

The BBFC and Hammer

- After Dracula (1958) – the censors had taken on and lost a battle with Hammer
- Hammer had effectively called their bluff
- The kind of films Hammer were producing were proving themselves to be a 'shot in the arm' for the British film industry
- Other studios were wanting to get in on the act

Sadian Horror

- The Sadian Horror title is usually attributed to three Anglo Amalgamated films made between 1959-1960
- *Horrors of the Black Museum* (1959)
- *Circus of Horrors* (1959)
- *Peeping Tom* (1960)
- Aesthetically different from Hammer Productions
- Used Eastman colour, whereas Hammer used Technicolour – 'gritty' cheap sensationalism. Hammer's trademark was a kind of 'lush gothic'
- Modern day settings
- Visually inspired by 1950s pornography
- Preoccupied with crimes of violence (against women)
- Voyeuristic in their approach

Peeping Tom (1960)

Directed by Michael Powell

- Dark tone
- Grainy Eastman colour
- Uses the same themes/inspirations as *Circus of Horrors/Horrors of the Black Museum*

Peeping Tom (1960)

“The masterpiece of Anglo’s Sadian trilogy is undoubtedly Powell’s Peeping Tom, which fully deserves its present reputation as one of the most complex and mature films ever made in England.” - David Pirie

“I have always felt that Peeping Tom and [Fellini’s] 8½ say everything that can be said about filmmaking, about the process of dealing with film, the objectivity and subjectivity of it and the confusion between the two. Peeping Tom shows the aggression of it, how the camera violates.” - Martin Scorsese

- Voyeuristic
- Disturbing
- An intelligent psychological thriller
- *Peeping Tom* amplifies this ‘feeling’
- The voyeurism is pushed further
- In the opening scene, we see *through* the scene via Mark’s camera
- The female victim is a prostitute – this is made absolutely clear – not hinted at as in *Horrors of the Black Museum*
- The camera shots
- The clicking of the camera
- These shots are 16mm
- The film, this scene in particular, is Brechtian in style
- We are never allowed to forget that this is a film
- The film is not just a horror film, the film is a film about the ‘experience’ of watching a horror film
- Mark Lewis – a camera man and part time film maker
- He is the ultimate ‘voyeuristic’ killer
- His mission is to make the world’s best film – the fact that it’s a snuff movie, is irrelevant to him
- Looks at the ‘results’ of an abusive childhood upbringing
- It’s a psychological thriller
- It makes us ‘feel’ empathy for the murderer – this adds a disturbing layer

Reaction

- **Critics hated the subject matter**

“It’s a long time since a film disgusted me as much as Peeping Tom.” - Caroline Lejeune

“Essentially vicious”. - Dillis Powell

Censorship and the Anglo Horrors

- John Trevelyan was under increasing pressure
- It might have been okay to suppress the unpopular but he couldn’t afford to fly in the face of a successful industry
- Trevelyan was cautioning his examiners that if they were too hard on the industry, there would be consequences

Censorship and the Anglo Horrors

“...there would be no hope that a film made from the script as it stands would be acceptable” - Audrey Field

- But the film was released containing most (if not all) of the material the BBFC had originally objected to
- Even though the film contained ‘challenging and shocking material’ – Trevelyan trusted in Powell’s reputation
- Many of the ‘cuts’ went through unseen – based on this trust

“Here was a moral panic of a kind that far exceeded even the response to Hammer. The denunciations were hysterical and pretty well across the board while, unlike Hammer, Powell’s film did not even have the benefit of an audience to protect and champion it.” - David Pirie

Powell was asking his audience direct questions: you may be horrified by what you see (the shocks, the grisly murders), but to what extent are you complicit in agreeing to sit and watch? Is there are a part of you that secretly enjoys the carnage being served up for your entertainment? And, if so, who exactly is the voyeur here?” - David Gritten

Peeping Tom and Michael Powell

- The critical savagery went on
- Only recieved a limited release
- No one leaped to Powell’s defence
- It effectively ended his career
- He spoke very little about the film in later years

“From here, inevitably, everything changed. For the caution of Trevelyan’s examiners with regard to the Anglo films was now seemed to be vindicated...After this Trevelyan frequently informed film-makers that material he might have passed at the end of the 50s was no longer acceptable. As a consequence, no one should be surprised that British horror in the early 1960s, unlike the late 1950s had a subdued feel. Given the baying that ‘something should be done’ that followed Peeping Tom, in some respects it is remarkable that the British horror film survived at all.” - David Pirie

The Aftermath

- Arthur Crabtree – never worked in feature films again
- Sydney Hayers – went on to work in TV but did make one last horror film – *Night of the Eagle*
- Michael Powell *Peeping Tom* effectively ended his career