



# Hammer and Beyond: The British Horror Film

*By Peter Hutchings*



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## Hammer and Beyond: The British Horror Film By Peter Hutchings

From the late 1950s through to the 1970s, British horror was one of the most commercially successful areas of British cinema. The most prolific of horror producers was the relatively small company called Hammer Films, from which there emerged a series of gothic horrors, most notably those featuring Peter Cushing as Baron Frankenstein and Christopher Lee as Count Dracula. But the story of the British horror film involves more than the activities of the film makers at Hammer. Well over half of the British horror production came from other companies and the significance of British horror derives as much from the critical and popular responses to the films as it does from the film makers themselves. In order to ascertain the importance and merit of British horror, as well as the reason for Hammer's dominance, we also need to recognize that both creators and audiences exist within and in relation to a particular historical context. This book aims to demonstrate that these films do draw upon, represent, and are always locatable in relation to much broader shifts and tendencies in British social history. It is equally important, however, to think of these films on the most basic levels and regardless of how one values them, as aesthetic and artful constructs which are to a certain extent separate from the everyday concerns and experiences of their intended audience. What this means when we look at the films is that we need to be aware of how they fit into and sometimes diverge from the characteristic practices and concerns of British cinema at the time of their production. Only in this way can a sense be gained both of their social resonance and their cinematic specificity. This book traces the changing nature of the British horror from the mid-1940s to the present day as it constantly seeks to redefine itself in the face of social change.



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