

Spadoni, Robert. *Uncanny bodies: the coming of sound film and the origins of the horror genre*. California, 2007.

190p bibl filmography index afp; ISBN 9780520251212, \$60.00; ISBN 9780520251229 pbk, \$24.95. Reviewed in 2008mar CHOICE.

When reading this rich, insightful book, one easily imagines the terrifying power of a quiet footstep. Conversant with a broad range of things uncanny, Spadoni (English, Case Western Reserve Univ.) examines the early Universal horror-film cycle, exploring not only the weirdness of the genre but also the parallel emergence of the transitional sound film. Extending Peter Hutchings's *The Horror Film* (2004), with its attention to screams and eerie sounds, the present work listens to the maniacal laughter, hissings, and howls of children of the night in two 1931 films, Tod Browning's *Dracula* and James Whale's *Frankenstein*. Rooted in reception studies, this study reveals that audience fascination with the new audio technology conjured up notions like ventriloquism and voodooism to accentuate the odd experience of entering a kingdom of talking shadows. The strange talking black-and-white pictures evoked a ghostliness that matched the haunted genre itself. Spadoni has synthesized a poetic and clever analysis, presenting impressive historical scholarship with panache to show how phantoms were animated by the electric spark of sound synchronization, providing audiences with audio bumps in the night.

Summing Up: Highly recommended. All readers, all levels.

-- J. M. Tomich, Kansas State University