



The Miskatonic Institute of Horror Studies, which I attended during all of last year, began its second year a couple of weeks ago with the first class of a four-week course on Universal monsters, intended to “examine the main themes and stylistic characteristics of the horror films produced by Universal Studios during the 1930s.” I blogged about my classes sparingly during all of last year, but I will keep a steadier, clearer log this time around.



Teacher Charlie Ellbé opened the class with a lecture covering the origins of Universal and horror in general, tracing the influence of German Expressionism using a clip from *NOSFERATU* (1922) and establishing *THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME* (1925) and *THE MAN WHO LAUGHS* (1928) as vital predecessors—sharing sets, aesthetics and cast members with other Universal productions. *THE MAN WHO LAUGHS* was examined for its recycling of sets as well. All of this led to the screening of Tod Browning’s masterful *DRACULA*, which is a perfect entry point into the world of Universal monsters, which I have a passing—and apparently lazy (!)—acquaintance with.

The post-screening discussion touched upon a variety of fascinating points, notably *DRACULA*’s minimal use of sound and significant theatricality—the stasis of the *mise en scène*

## Miskatonic Institute: Universal Monsters, Class 1 of 4

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, the slightly exaggerated performances and the naturalism inherent to the animal imagery all contributing to a specific mood and atmosphere. This makes DRACULA quite unique among the Universal productions, and perfectly matches Bela Lugosi's legendary performance. Also shown was a clip from the Mexican version, which was shot at the same time and used the same sets, looks undeniably subpar yet totally awesome in its campy, unconvincing Dracula and Spanish-speaking glory.