

## Reading Homework

### The First Horror Sequel

The word “sequel” derives from the combination of the words “series” and “equal” and means “the next part of a story”. In Hollywood film history there have been sequels since the very earliest days of film making. We should not confuse the term “sequel” with “genre”. A “genre” refers to a type or category of films which share similar themes, stories and styles. The *Phantom of the Opera* and *Dracula* are in the same genre even though at the time *Phantom of the Opera* was made, Carl Laemmle Jr. had not yet coined the expression “horror movie”. *Dracula* is not a sequel to *Phantom of the Opera* even though they are in the same genre. The films have completely different characters and stories. On the other hand, a sequel is the continuation of the *same* story with at least some of the same characters as the original.

Why do studios choose to make sequels instead of focusing their energies on new stories and characters? Studios make sequels because they are a much safer way to guarantee a film



will make money. Studios usually only make sequels to films which were financially successful. This is simply another Hollywood formula that works. Universal was the first studio to employ the star system, use the Great Novel plus Great Production plus Great Star formula and they were also the first studio to produce a major sequel to a very successful film.

*The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) was the first true sequel in the horror genre and one of the earliest examples of a

major film sequel. It is considered to be one of the greatest sequels ever made.

Universal was depending on something called “brand loyalty” when they produced *The Bride of Frankenstein*. We all know what this is. It is our loyalty to a product we have once enjoyed whether it is our favorite brand of beer, shampoo, toothpaste or automobile. Brand loyalty works in almost any industry, but Universal was the first studio to recognize that audiences would not only loyally follow their favorite stars, like Lon Chaney, but would *also* follow their favorite *fictional characters* like Frankenstein and his monster.

Many critics argue that *The Bride of Frankenstein* is an even greater film than the original, but *I strongly disagree*. As much as the two films are linked by having the same characters and a story that the second film continues from almost exactly the point where the first film ended, the films are very different indeed and in my mind the original is still the better film. In fact, as I have often said, *Frankenstein* is possibly the greatest



horror film ever made. This is because the film took itself seriously and explored the mysteries of life and death, man’s relationship to God, guilt and innocence, not to mention the symbolic use of light and fire and the windmill. The first film also gives us those extraordinary moments such as when the monster raises his face to the light like a saint looking up to heaven or when he makes the silent appeal with his hands to ask “why have you taken the light?”. There is also the magnificent moment when the

monster takes the flower from the child’s hand and smiles gently. These are some of the greatest single moments in film history. The second film has *little* of this.

So why do other film critics love it so? They love it for a number of reasons. They love the sheer style with which James Whale made the film second film. The sets are far more elaborate and Whale greatly increases the use of shadows and especially weird camera angles which give the film a much more expressionist style than the first film. The critics also greatly enjoyed the use of comedy which Whale added to the second film. This is where I disagree with the majority. For me, it is exactly because the first movie is so serious that it is great, while the second film with its much less serious approach is merely good fun. In the next lesson we are going to turn our attention to *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) and see just how Universal pulled off their success with the first true horror sequel.