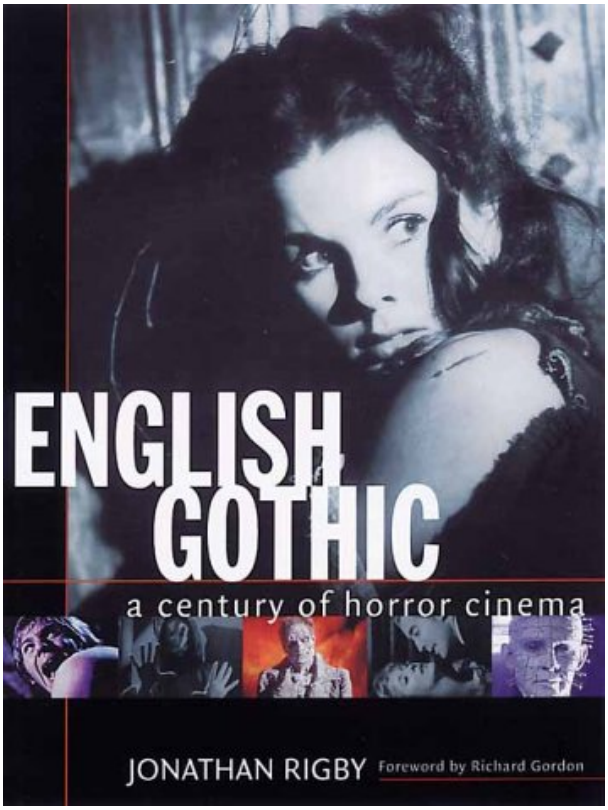
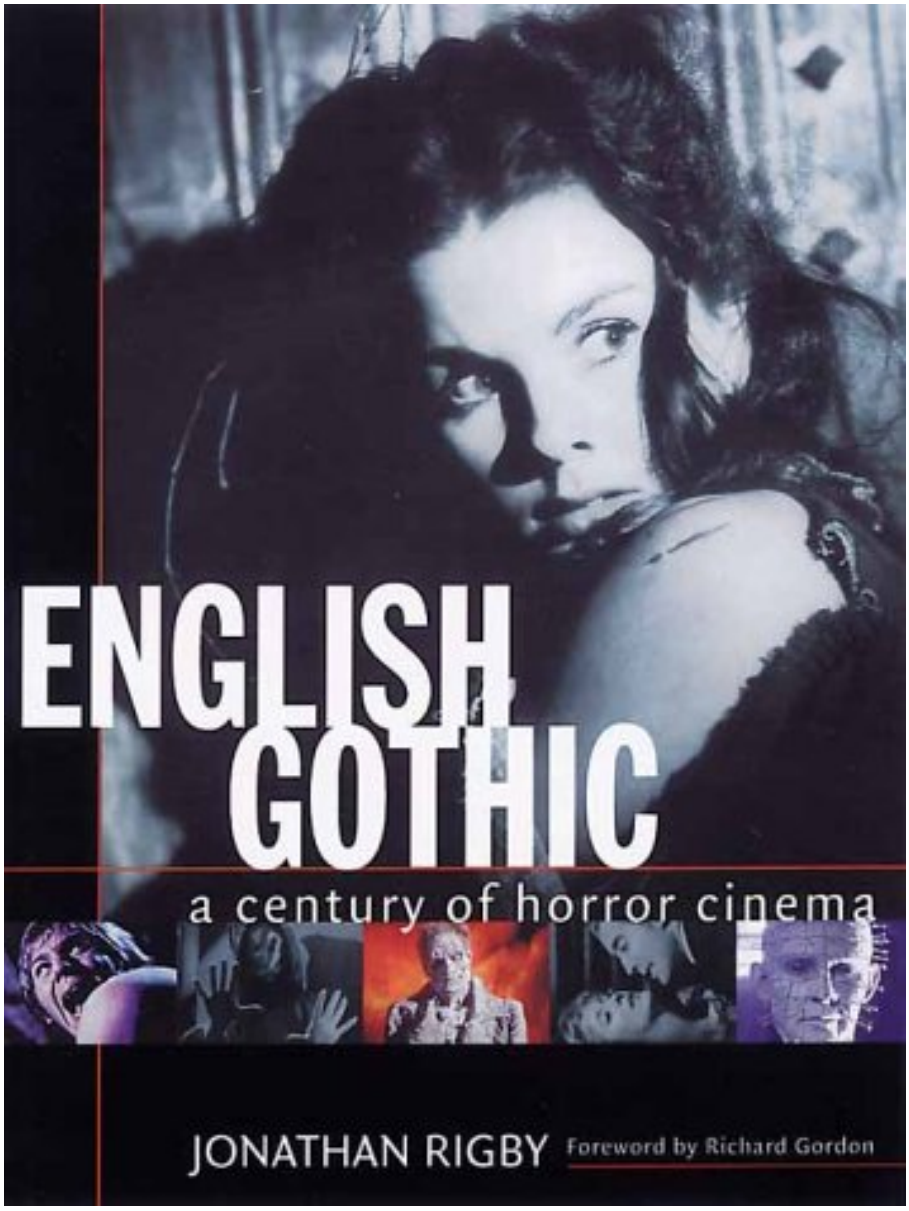
ENGLISH GOTHIC: A CENTURY OF HORROR CINEMA BY JONATHAN RIGBY





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From Publishers Weekly
Though British horror films enjoyed a golden age from the mid-'50s to the mid-'70s, film critics were long reluctant to give Britain its due, according to film historian Jonathan Rigby. He buries any lingering doubts about his country's unique and considerable contributions to the genre in English Gothic: A Century of Horror Cinema, taking readers on a deliciously chilling ride from the silent era through 1975. Particularly riveting are the more than 150 film stills and other black-and-white photos that capture characters cowering in fear, being stalked by mummies and turning into werewolves; fortunately, these overshadow the small type, packed too tightly into its pages.

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From the silent era to ³Hellraiser,² a compelling illustrated history of the British horror film, featuring 100 key movies and 150 illustrations, stills, and photos.

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Most helpful customer reviews

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.
Definitive and absorbing.
By Dennis Hawley
As a huge fan of horror and science fiction films of the 'Golden Age' of the genre, I've always had a particular fondness for the (generally) more sophisticated and cerebral output of the British studios. As was the case for many of my generation ('baby boomers'), my introduction to these great films began with the legendary Hammer Studio's remakes of the classic Universal monster films, kicked off by the seminal Peter Cushing/Christopher Lee vehicle 'The Curse of Frankenstein'. I recall being scared silly as a child by the indelible image of Christopher Lee's bloodshot, snarling visage in the staircase scene from the superb 'Horror of Dracula', of having my heart race with excitement while watching Lee's turn as 'The Mummy', and, like a drug addict, anxiously awaiting the next chiller to be exported to U.S. movie screens. For those who harbor similar memories, 'English Gothic' is for you (this review is of the 2nd edition).
There have been numerous other books that took a turn at this historically important product, but none (at least that I've read) comes close to this book's comprehensiveness, style and sheer reading pleasure. Author Jonathan Rigby (an actor himself) infuses this masterful work with insightfulness and attention to detail that could well serve as a model for others. Beginning with a chapter titled 'British Horror in Embryo', it concludes with the sad (but accurately titled) final chapter, 'British Horror in Retreat'. In between one will find a veritable treasure trove of detail, the effect of which is to present the reader with a unique contribution that is at once both somewhat scholarly yet readily accessible. While this loving treatment of British horror films (broadly defined, as it encompasses related mystery and science fiction titles as well) stands on its own, the book offers much more. It provides for a fascinating sociological context as well: the output of British studios, both in quantity and theme, reflect the socio/political milieu of the times. In addition, it does what no similar book has done, which is to provide a sense of what British Gothic film making was really like. It's almost like being an invisible observer, hovering over the studios during production. Even movie fans that do not care for horror films would find this aspect of the book worthwhile.
The book's 260-plus pages give appropriate focus on the aforementioned grandfather of British horror, Hammer, without cutting short the contributions of other notable studios (such as Amicus and Tigon), as well as the sometimes complex co-production arrangements between these studios and those of other countries (for example, the collaborations between Hammer and such American production companies as AIP, Universal and Warners). Such detail is very informative. It's surprising how many such films, perceived as American, were in fact British productions (such as 'Fiend Without a Face' and 'First Man into Space').
While American readers will find themselves at a slight disadvantage with the lack of familiarity with references to established British character actors, television programs, scene locations and the occasional slang phrase, this is a minor distraction. If you're a fan of British horror/science fiction, or simply of film making in general, 'English Gothic' deserves a place in your library.

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful.
Essential for the Horror Fan
By Michael Samerdyke
This is one of the best books written on the horror film. Rigby writes well and is very informative about the development of the British horror film from silents to the Nineties.

Of course, the heart of his book is the era from 1956-74, roughly from "The Creeping Unknown" to "The Wicker Man." Even if you have read about Hammer films before, Rigby has something new to say. He has seen EVERYTHING from this era, and his book steered me to fascinating movies like "Demons of the Mind" and "And Now the Screaming Starts" that I would never have heard of otherwise.

I don't agree with all of his opinions. (Rigby is incredibly down on the movies of Amicus Studios.) But

Rigby really appreciates Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee, Terrence Fisher and Freddie Francis, making this a fun, informative read. Horror fans could only do themselves a favor by buying it. A most enjoyable book and one that the reader will go back to many times.

9 of 10 people found the following review helpful.
a review from England
By A Customer
SINCE THE AMAZON.COM SITE IS NOT INTEGRATED WITH THE AMAZON.UK.COM SITE, I DRUG R.TRIPP'S REVIEW TO THE U.S. SITE:
R. Tripp (Gavcrimson@tesco.net) from london, england , 15 August, 2000 The Life and Times of the British Horror Movie.
As the opening chapter to English Gothic-a century of horror cinema by Jonathan Rigby notes there is a tendency among British books on British horror films to be divided into camps. The Seventies offered an endless gravy train of coffee table books, poor old Denis Gifford had a noted passion for horror films of the Thirties, but ignored Hammer films and pained himself to mention anything from the dreaded permissive society. Even younger critics who carried the Hammer torch spat venom at everything that came after. Ever since then few books have covered the entire spectrum of British horror cinema without any sign of generation gaps- the only one in recent memory being Fragments of Fear by Andy Boot. Fragments was chatty and likeable but unfortunately stereotypical of the sort of book that David McGillivray talks of in this books afterword, full of unchecked facts, typos and riddled with errors. Compared to Fragments the tone of English Gothic is more down to business and could be accused of lacking the obvious author enjoyment of Boot's tome, but in every other way this is a superior book. For one, its not about to label Corruption (1967) as a part of the Tigon legacy, when it was made by Titan. In fact English Gothic is the Encyclopaedia Britannica when it comes to obscure facts, quotes and eye opening asides. Well researched ? most of the book is structured chronologically by the day the films went into production! This depth of information is also mirrored visually, when was the last time you saw ads, pressbooks or any pictorial evidence of films like Secrets of Sex, Cover Girl Killer or Burke and Hare?. Despite its title which gives the impression the book is strictly dedicated to period pieces, English Gothic also uncovers 60's and 70's present day titles who carry with them what Rigby dubs "a peculiarly British kind of seediness". Connoisseurs however will notice there is no mention of forgotten shorts like Death Shock and Invitation to Hell or vague transatlantic productions like Slaughter High and Living Doll, but this is the first book to cover the Sohoian likes of Cover Girl Killer and Night After Night or Norman J Warren's back catalogue (the latter notably absent from the Boot book). The sole aspect of discontent is the book's constant references to "depressingly popular" 80's slasher films since only two of the 500 films discussed (Killer's Moon, Don't Open till Christmas) could fit into this category. For all the print offered to the likes of Expose and Satan's Slave this curiously puritanical overkill threatens to drag English Gothic back to the Denis Gifford era, but its only a momentary lapse from what is otherwise an excellent book. No doubt books on British horror movies may come and go (indeed several others are in the pipeline) but in years to come its hard to imagine that English Gothic won't still be used as the definitive reference book.

See all 5 customer reviews...

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