

Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932)

Tone, Community, Disability, and the Stare

Theme, Character, & Plot

As we discuss question accompanied by particular shots, feel free to employ any film terminology from the Film Terms handout. We will focus on technique, however, on D2.

Acting

#8: This early “talkie” employs many actors who worked in the silent era. Does the exaggerated facial expressiveness — required in silent film — add to or detract from this film’s dramatic character?



Community

#2: The opening scene's barker notes that the carnival workers are a community—and law—unto themselves. “Offend one and you offend them all.” Does the film support this assertion?



Community

#5: Don John finds carnies with physical and cognitive disabilities congregating in a wooded area, and becomes angry, arguing that they “should be smothered at birth.” Does the film support this eugenic declaration?



Community

#11: What factors best explain the camaraderie shared by the film's two, closely knit circles of carnival workers?



Community

#20: The young woman with no arms observes that Cleopatra “isn’t one of us.” What is required to become part of this particular group?



Community

#24: Why does Cleo become so upset at her own wedding party?



Identity

#14: Is Josephine Joseph (who at least *performs* an intersexual identity) primarily a target of fun, or do they emerge with a confident, empowered identity?



Disability

#19: Do the actions of the armless ladies and male “Living Torso” humanize them within this film, or turn them into objectified spectacles?



Horror

#26: Do the carnies' actions on a stormy night alter audience sympathy?



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YOU GOT THIS BOTTLE
OF POISON TO KILL.



Horror

#27: Does the original ending transform our heroes into *monsters*?



Horror

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Horror

#27: Does the original ending transform our heroes into *monsters*?



Pre-Transformation: Flying High

#28: Is Cleo's new appearance, revealed at the end of the story, an *appropriate* transformation given what we have learned of her character?



Transformation

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