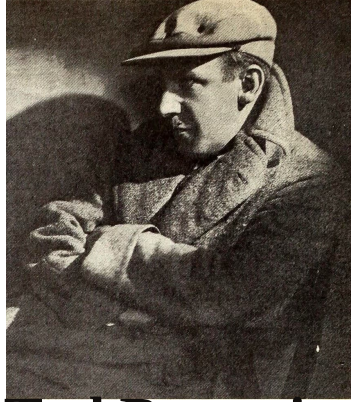




Tod Browning

July 12, 1880 - October 6, 1962

Malibu, California

Tod Browning, the runaway carnival hand who directed *Dracula* and then made a picture so strange it nearly ended his career, died alone at his home in Malibu, California, on October 6, 1962. He was eighty-two. A throat operation earlier that year for cancer of the larynx had left the old showman unable to speak.

He was born Charles Albert Browning Jr. in Louisville, Kentucky, on July 12, 1880, into a comfortable Baptist household. His uncle was Pete Browning, the ballplayer whose nickname went onto the Louisville Slugger bat. At sixteen, before finishing high school, Charles ran off with a traveling circus. He worked sideshows and vaudeville as a barker, a magician's assistant and a comic, and took the stage name Tod, the German word for death, which tells you something about his sense of humor.

He drifted into silent pictures around 1913 and was directing by 1915. That year, driving drunk, he hit a locomotive at a railroad crossing; actor Elmer Booth was killed, and Browning was badly hurt. The films he made afterward turned darker, full of crime, guilt and punishment.

His great partner was Lon Chaney, the Man of a Thousand Faces. Under producer Irving Thalberg at MGM they made eight hits together in the late 1920s, including *The Unholy Three*, full of disguises and tricks that came straight from the carnival. In 1931 Browning directed Bela Lugosi in *Dracula* for Universal, and the cape and the accent never left the culture.

Then came *Freaks* in 1932, cast with real sideshow performers he had known for decades. Audiences recoiled and studios got nervous; critics later called it a masterpiece of empathy. His final film, *Miracles for Sale*, came out in 1939, and he retired to Malibu.

When his wife Alice died in 1944, Variety mixed up the names and ran his obituary instead, eighteen years early. He was buried at Angelus-Rosedale Cemetery in Los Angeles.

Services

Died alone at his home in Malibu, California, October 6, 1962, aged 82. Film director of Dracula (1931) and Freaks (1932). Interment: Angelus-Rosedale Cemetery, Los Angeles. Portrait: c. 1921 trade-press photograph (public domain), cropped and hosted by Notice Nearby.

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