Outer models and genericity

If $V$ is a standard transitive model of ZFC, say that a transitive $W \supseteq V$ is an outer model of $V$ if $W$ contains the same ordinals as $V$ and if $(W, V)$ satisfies ZFC in a language with a predicate symbol for $V$. Why is forcing the only known method for constructing outer models? How strong is generic absoluteness? We approach these questions by characterizing those outer models of a given model that are set generic and those that are class generic in each of two senses.