

*"The Style of Horror Parody from Young  
Frankenstein(1974) to Scary Movie(2000)".*

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## **Declaration of Originality**

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfillment of the examination for the BA (Honours) (Degree in Animation). It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

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Michelle Higgins –

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## Abstract

This paper is about the relationship between horror and parody. This paper discusses the style of horror parodies. This paper gives the reader an introduction to the parody genre by analyzing three horror parodies in detail. Parody serves to reframe a target text or genre and reframes its source material to add comedy by mimicking it. However, parody can also serve as an educative piece of media. Exaggeration and inclusion of meta-humor can allow the filmmaker to comment on areas of their target text. Allowing audiences to have a wider discussion on the source material being parodied. For the most part, parody relies on its audience to have an active recognition of the source material while watching parody to understand what is taking place. So parody films employ recognizable iconography and *mise-en-scene* from their target texts.

In the first chapter, I introduce the readers to the style of the horror genre through an analysis of Universal Studios in the 1930s, the studio behind James Whale's *Frankenstein*(1931), one of the first American horror films. *Frankenstein's*(1931) *mise-en-scene* was heavily influenced by gothic literature and German Expressionism. In the second chapter, I analyze my first parody, *Young Frankenstein*(Brooks, 1974), which deconstructs Universal Studios *Frankenstein*(1931) and charmingly reiterates its narrative and art style. Brooks' film utilizes comedic tools such as juxtaposition, and literalization and subverts its audience's expectation to interlace the original with humor. In my third chapter, I analyze a subgenre of horror that became popular in the 70s called the slasher genre. By this period audiences are familiar with genre conventions. The genre has a generative representation when it comes to its tropes and it gives makers of parody ammunition to make commentary on the genre. In chapter four, I will discuss two parodies that approach parodying the slasher genre in different ways. By discussing *Scream*(Craven, 1996) and *Scary Movie*(Wayans, 2000) I analyze different styles parody can use to approach parodying the horror genre.

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# Introduction

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I grew up watching horror parodies. I probably watched all of the Dimension Films *Scary Movie*(Wayans, 2000) films before the age of fifteen. Due to the age rating, this was thanks to an older sister. I enjoyed Wes Craven's *Scream*(1996) while being supervised by an older sibling, which acted as a big introduction to the rules of horror films. While some critics say that parody is only mimicry (emulating and mocking) I agree with the critics who propose that parody functions to foster new ways to view texts, thus educating audiences and connecting them and the text on another level of appreciation and understanding. I have an appreciation for both horror and parody films. Parodies can target any genre but I'd like to look at how parody functions with horror as its source material and how it succeeds in entertaining pre-existing fans and allows filmmakers to comment on areas of the horror genre.

Parody relies on its audience to have an active recognition of the source material while watching parody so they understand what is taking place. So horror parody films employ recognizable iconography and *mise-en-scene* from horror films. I'd like to go over some films in the horror genre to give the readers an introduction to the genre before analyzing parodies of films from the horror genre to see how the iconography of horror has been utilized in parody.

In my first chapter, I'll look at the horror genre in the 1930s with a focus on Universal Studios' films to help me analyze how that period of horror films translates into parody. I'll be analyzing Universal Studios *Frankenstein*(Whale, 1931) and discussing its *mise-en-scene*, horror tropes, and iconography. As one of the earliest American horror films *Frankenstein*(1931) is responsible for creating and popularizing horror tropes and

imagery that would become associated with the genre. In Chapter 2, I'll discuss Mel Brooks' *Young Frankenstein*(1974), a parody of both James Whale's 1931 original and its sequel *Bride of Frankenstein*(Whale, 1931). I'll discuss how it reflects the style of horror in the 1930s. In Chapter 3, I'll look at more contemporary films in the horror genre to cover a larger topic area. I'll discuss a subgenre of horror films called the slasher genre that became popular in the 1970s. In the last 25 years, there have been many successful parodies of this area of horror and I think it'll be worth analyzing to have a more extensive look at different styles of parody. In Chapter 4 I want to discuss two more recent parodies that take different approaches to translating the slasher films of the late 20th century. I will be looking at *Scream*(1996) and its counterpart *Scary Movie*(2000). I'll be analyzing how these parodies reiterate their target sources and the commentary these parodies make on common tropes in the slasher genre. Overall this thesis will cover different methods used by filmmakers and will analyze different ways parody functions by focusing on how filmmakers translate the horror genre into parody.

## Defining the Characteristics of Parody

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The horror genre has always been parodied. This could be related to the active audience participation part of horror and comedy films that leads to the success of horror parodies. Both genres require audience understanding to get reactions whether it's screaming or laughing. The watching of parody is a multi-tiered affair that operates around the audience's knowledge and understanding of the original film's narrative and the symbols within it. Parodies include recognizable images from their source materials to help their audiences understand they're watching a parody.

Dan Harries describes parody “- as the process of recontextualizing a target or source text through the transformation of its textual ( and contextual) elements, thus creating a new text” (Harries, 2000, p. 6).

Parody uses reiteration to create similarity between itself and its *subject*, through methods such as quotation and *evocation*. Parody films need to replicate the visual qualities of their proto texts. Using similar iconography helps the audience understand that they're watching a parody. Because of the repeated appearances of iconography, certain imagery becomes associated with its genre through recognition. Thus, including iconography from a previous film helps the audience recognize scenes, tropes, and types of characters from proto texts. A viewer watching parodies would become familiar with the trope of the film being parodied. Dan Harries' chapter on reiteration (2000, p. 43) goes into great detail on how parody evokes their target texts.

Parody is used in TV and film in many different contexts. I want to analyze parody to discuss both its educational and entertainment qualities. By targeting various horror film parodies and discussing their style and mechanics. Parody can employ irony, intertextuality, and mimicry to add comedy to horror narratives. Horror parodies can also take horror iconography and repurpose it for comedy. Parodies can introduce audiences to film genre rules that they're unfamiliar with—making them an educational genre of film with educational moments.

Parodies associated with comedy often use this recognition to subvert audiences' expectations. By using similar iconography and mise-en-scene as its source material, *Young Frankenstein*(1974) reaffirms the traits and themes of Whale's adaptation while exaggerating comic elements to play with the audience. Recognizing the mechanisms of its construction one might think of alternative ways of telling it. The director Wes Craven includes similar sequences and symbols from 1980s horror in his film *Scream*(1996) to discuss certain tropes.

## The Horror Genre and Parody

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I will discuss the design elements of the individual films' mise-en-scene. The mise-en-scene includes the framing and everything within the frame of a film. The mise-en-scene can dynamically alter the film's narrative and can help characterize the whole film. I'd like to discuss how mise-en-scene benefits parody by engaging audiences with the genre.

The horror genre is full of classic tropes and patterns. It is one of the most generative genres out there according to experts, this is clear and most true in cases of slasher films, which became relevant following the 70s. However, that case stands true in the early decades of horror with films such as *Frankenstein* (Whale, 1931) and *Dracula* (Browning, 1931) from Universal Studio films following hallowed tales. Horror films have always followed tropes and patterns, making it an easy genre to replicate in parody. Parodies often target horror as source material to levitate its more terrifying moments. These characteristics give parody a lot of opportunity to spoof the territory.

# Chapter One: Classical Horror

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## Universal Studios

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In this chapter, I will discuss Classic Horror Films. I have pointed out that parody needs to share similarities with the subject it's parodying by employing similar iconography or verbal quotation. In this chapter, I will be talking about Universal Studios. It is inarguably, the home of the biggest icons associated with the horror genre (Neibaur, 2017, p. xii). Iconography from these films springs to mind when someone brings up the horror genre. I will discuss the importance of iconography by analyzing James Whale's *Frankenstein*(1931).

The horror genre in the 1930s is mainly associated with Universal Studios due to household names such as *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*. Universal Studios was the home of horror in the 1930s, largely due to the success of Whale's *Frankenstein*(1931). Despite *Frankenstein*(1931) being released a few months after Tod Browning's *Dracula*(1931), *Frankenstein*(1931) is more recognized as the success of horror in cinema due to its huge commercial success and the success of its sequel *Bride of Frankenstein*(1935).

In the early 1930s, Universal Studios was trying to break into the horror genre market to create high-production pictures that offered a high-class experience (Neale, 2000, p.88). Universal's success in horror with *Dracula*(1931) and *Frankenstein*(1931)

was followed by a wave of successors and it led to horror films finding a mainstream audience. The success of *Bride Of Frankenstein*(1935) showed that a sequel using previously known characters could be a commercial success on the screen. And the studio that had originally aimed for variation in its content, was now starting to franchise its properties.

According to Jancovich quoted in *Caligari's Heirs*(Hantke, 2007, p. xi), Universal horror films of the 1930s were influenced by both German expressionist cinema and Gothic literature. James Whale took a lot of inspiration from both German Expressionist Cinema and Gothic Literature himself. In 1931 James Whale was offered his choice of Universal properties to adapt to screen. He chose to adapt a piece of Gothic literature, Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein*. Gothic writers tended to write about human nature and the limits of the 18th century, in Paul Wells's words "*to interrogate boundaries they were facing*" ( Wells, 2000, p. 39) and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*(1818) was not an exception.

*Frankenstein*(Shelley, 1818) is not subtle with its themes of human nature. As a result of the mad scientist's persistent curiosity about what it is to be human, he eventually defies the laws of humanity by creating life himself from cadavers.

James Whale's adaptation of *Frankenstein*(Shelley, 1818) is recognized as an expression of Universal Studios' art style in the 1930s. The visual elements in *Frankenstein*(1931) set a cohesive style for all of Universal's monster pictures in the 1930s (Horton, 2014, p. 66). Creating the impression of a cinematic universe even before the crossover films in the 1940s and 50s. Whale's admiration for German Expressionism helped establish a polished style for this time in horror cinema.

The owner and founder of Universal Studios was Carl Laemmle and all Laemmle productions included settings inspired by central Europe (Horton, 2014, p. 15). Laemmle, being careful not to let himself go bankrupt, gave his productions relatively

low budgets. As a result, most of Universal's horror films were often filmed in very high contrast to disguise and make up for the film's unpolished sets.



Figure 1: Claude Rains as mad scientist Dr Jack Griffin in *The Invisible Man*(1933)



Figure 2: Colin Clive and Dwight Fyre as the mad scientist and assistant in Frankenstein's laboratory. *Frankenstein* (1931).

Horror cinema was at a melancholic and rebellious phase between the two world wars. *Bride of Frankenstein*(1935) stood out to audiences with how it highlighted horror tropes and reflexive areas for the audience's enjoyment. This led to the realization that horror cinema could be parodied and made to bring fun to the big screen. After *Bride of Frankenstein*(1935) filmmakers would continue to depict the Frankenstein mythos on screen.

Following the success of Universal Studios' *Frankenstein*(1931), sequels for *Dracula*(1931), *The Mummy*(Freud, 1932), and *The Invisible Man*(Whale, 1933) were produced. The commercial success of the horror sequel was fun, but importantly Frankenstein showed audiences and filmmakers that horror could be fun (*The Universal "Monster Mash" movies of the 1940s*, 2009).

## Frankenstein (1931)

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James Whale's Frankenstein films are great examples of horror iconography. *Frankenstein*(1931) has its mise en scene unique to itself that's targeted by Mel Brooks's parody of the film. That is the mad scientist's laboratory.

James Whale's *Frankenstein*(1931) resulted in the change and birth of new iconography in the horror industry. During this time in the film industry aesthetics were changing in gothic horror. Common motifs from horror literature such as graveyards, crumbling dwellings, corpses, and crypts, would still be featured in films of the late 1930s and 1940s but as time passed the threats in horror cinema would more commonly be mad scientists, psychopaths, and extraterrestrials. *Frankenstein*(1931) sped up this revolutionary change with imagery of eccentric and dazzling machinery that was a sensory bonanza for audiences (Morra, 2019). Whale's adaptation was often regarded as a grizzly and materialistic treatment of Shelley's medieval novel, which had no mention of the electrical machinery Whale introduced (Joe Schwarcz PhD, 2021).

*The Cabinet of Dr Caligari's*(Wiene, 1920) mise-en-scene helped inspire and define the characteristics of the horror genre in the early 20th century (Johnson, 2014). Part of that has to do with James Whale's admiration for German expressionism (Horton, 2014, p. 20). Whale conveyed the art style of replicating their use of lighting. The low-key lighting results in a high contrast appearance in classic black and white films, and due to its repeated use by Universal Studios, the appearance is associated with Gothic horror cinema. In scenes of high lighting contrast, the light is focused on the action of the scene to take focus off the backdrops. Low-key lighting was utilized repeatedly to make up for low-budget sets at Universal Studio and other horror studios.

In the scene where Fritz (played by Dwight Frye) taunts the monster, the *crazily-angled* walls of the chamber and the tilted shadows, the claustrophobic and jarring setting are the result of German expressionist inspiration. The rest of the film incorporates similar tilted and slanted hillsides giving the art style of *Frankenstein*(1931) an off-kilter appearance throughout the film as the audience explores Frankenstein's castle.



Figure 3: Colin Clive and Boris Karloff as Henry Frankenstein and The Monster, in *Frankenstein* (1931).



Figure 4: Boris Karloff and Dwight Frye as The Monster and Fritz, in *Frankenstein* (1931).

In a way, Henry Frankenstein is a man of social revolution and science. He sees himself at times as a god creating life. How his laboratory is represented reflects these aspects of his character. Frankenstein's laboratory is in the heart of an aged castle. The lab itself is a technological marvel. The scene where Henry Frankenstein brings his monster to life is a powerful image associated with this film and the revolution horror was taking at the time. A violent storm backdrops the scene, Henry leads his guests taking shelter from the storm to the lab at the center of his castle. Victor, Elizabeth, and Dr Waldman sit as Henry stands over them to tell them of the nature of his experiment. The crack of thunder launched Henry and Fritz into action to prepare the cadaver. When the cadaver is hoisted up to the opening in the castle ceiling it's metaphorically and physically illuminated! The lights in the scene are specially illuminated on the black-and-white screen. The onlookers, Victor, Elizabeth, and Dr Waldman freeze in fright as they watch from afar. The camera pulls away from the spectacle and then narrows its attention to the hand of the monster.

The spectacle that happens in the lab is a crucial part of the film's narrative and an iconic piece of cinema. The monster created in the lab would cause uproar and the townsfolk would round up to defeat the monster. The scene also stands out from the eccentric lab's dazzling lights juxtaposing the rest of the film's central European setting. The rest of the setting was inspired by Carl Laemmle Jr and James Whale's backgrounds. James Whale came from a working-class background (Horton, p. 61) and Henry Frankenstein came from wealth, as noted by his family's lavish home and family servants, but created a monster who was dressed as a peasant.

Horror films of the 1930s were a great introduction to audiences to a world of cinema and film rules. Films where communities are terrorized by bizarre monsters who are outcasts from society. And communities eventually rise together to defeat this monster. After the impact of WW2 horror films with dark natures were deemed inappropriate in comparison to the horrors of real warfare. In the 1940s horror monsters were parodied and brought back as comic figures. And film creators started producing more films that parodied horror cinemas' generative nature and reflexivity. (Wells, 2000, p. 53) The monster's likeness and narrative were parodied for entertainment.

In 1974 Mel Brooks's parody *Young Frankenstein*(1974) would be regarded as one of the best tributes to James Whale's adaptation, emulating the original's qualities, and be known as one of the funniest films ever made. (Michael Balderston, 2021). Although Mel Brooks' film did not come from Universal Studios it parodied the fun of it and made tributes to the studio's legacy.

This chapter has explained the style of Universal Studios. How it favored European imagery and stylistic elements from Gothic Literature. The art style of *Frankenstein*(1931) and the significance of the style to the horror genre. In the next chapter, I will discuss a parody called *Young Frankenstein*(1974) which encapsulates the legacy and *mise-en-scene* of its target text. While twisting the source material into a delightful comedy that appeals to comedy fans and fans of the original horror.

## Chapter Two: *Young Frankenstein*(1974) as a parody of 1930s iconography

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The film's depiction of the mad scientist, his hunchbacked assistant, and the monster would become iconic.

According to experts such as Robert Horton(2014, p. 43), *Young Frankenstein*(1974) is the most visible result of Frankenstein's legacy. *Young Frankenstein* (1974) was created by Mel Brooks and Michael Gruskoff. Starring Gene Wilder as the grandson of Victor Frankenstein and Peter Doyle as the monster. *Young Frankenstein*(1974) parodies scenes and tropes from both *Frankenstein*(1931) and *Bride Of Frankenstein*(1935). It recreates scenes from both films, for example, it parodies the monster's encounter with little Maria (Marilyn Harris) from the first film, and the monster's visit with the blind hermit (O. P. Heggie) from its sequel.

The film is a parody in terms of equal respectful reiteration and comedic mimicry. Henri Bergson quoted in (Harries, 2000, p. 126 ) wrote that *Young Frankenstein*(1974) is recognized for its paramount reiteration of its source material. Scenes and iconography such as the costumes and props were included based on their strong association with the genre and recreated to connect the parody and the target text. Thus, *Young Frankenstein*(1974) includes cliched horror items like creaky doors, revolving bookcases, and cinematic thunder and lighting. It was important for Brooks to recreate the aesthetic of the original, as a result, the film's appearance was done in black-and-white.



Figure 5: *Young Frankenstein* (1974), the film was released in black-and-white.

Gerald Hirshfeld was the lead cinematographer working on *Young Frankenstein*(1974) and assisted Brooks in his decision to recreate the classic black and white look of James Whales' original, despite originally balking at the idea. The black-and-white style enhanced the mood and suited the film's goal to satirize the original. Hirshfeld emphasized the backlights and kept the middle tone to a minimum to recreate Whale's high-contrast style. Done in feature-length, each scene's *mise-en-scene* satirized the low-key lighting used in the 1930s. Upon creation of the film, it was learned that the original lab equipment used in 1931 was still in storage, in the garage of Kenneth Strickfaden the original inventor of the props in Whale's production. The electrical wizard Strickfaden was asked to join the crew and he produced new electrical devices for *Young Frankenstein*(1974)(Morra, 2019).



Figure 6: Gene Wilder and Peter Boyle perform *Putting on the Ritz* in *Young Frankenstein* (1974)

*Young Frankenstein's* (1974) similarity to its original brings a sense of pleasure and laughter, but more laughter in parody comes from genre conventions being thrown out the window (Harries, 2000, p. 126). According to James L Neibaur (2017, p. 193) in the late 1950s, Universal Studios distributed packages of their films to various TV outlets. The Universal Monster series came to TV stations in the shock theater packages. They would screen on weekends and they quickly became popular with mainstream audiences. They would include skits and it was common for the hosts opening the pictures to dress up in costumes of famous monster characters. Mel Brooks reflects on how horror films can be fun making Gene Wilder and Peter Doyle perform *Putting on The Ritz* in the middle of the film.

Writers of parody who are spoofing a source with recognizable genre conventions can create humorous effects by 'misusing' established genre tropes. Thus, after the monster leaves the castle the audience is led to expect the recreation of events in the past films. Mel Brooks creates an all too similar scene with the monster meeting a little girl and the blind Hermit in the woods.

In the 1931 original, there is a tragic moment where Karloff's monster meets a young girl and accidentally drowns her. This scene is echoed in Brook's adaptation when Doyle's monster meets a similar little girl. The little girl plays a game, throwing flower petals into a well and after the last petal is thrown in she asks "What should we throw in now?" Doyle's monster turns to the camera and flashes a knowing smile. In the original, Karloff's monster threw the girl in next and she tragically drowned. After the familiarity of the scene has set in with the audience, the scenes are rearranged to create an ironic effect. (Harries, 2000, p. 47). We expected the girl to meet the same faith as her original counterpart but in a sweet and comical turn of events, she ends up safely back in her bed after playing with the monster.

*"parody creates a humorous effect from the reframing of past models not usually tied to the comic"* - Henri Bergson (Harries, 2000, p. 126).

In *Bride of Frankenstein*(1935) the monster and the blind hermit form a heartwarming relationship based on their similar struggles and a strong lack of prejudice. We expect the hermit to run away in fear of the monster but instead, the musician is blind and he extends a hand of friendship. The audience sits expecting a heartwarming scene similar to the original. In Brooks' parody, the hermit accidentally pours hot soup into the monster's lap, and after he offers him a cigar. He accidentally lights his thumb on fire causing him to flee in panic from the hermit's shelter. When the audience watches films established on a set of rules they become surprised when the film subverts audience expectations. Throughout the scene, the monster is rolling his eyes exasperated by the blind man's clumsy actions and when the monster runs away from the helpless human it makes fun of horror films with a bit of role reversal.

Mel Brooks's humor in parody relies on the trans-textuality of parody's humor. Mel Brook's style of parody includes extra-textual references and relies on the audience to have a cultural awareness of what they're watching. Mel Brooks' humor aims to make terrible things entertaining. His father's family were German Jews and his mother was from Ukraine. He fought in the US Army against the Nazis and because of his history,

he finds it his calling to poke fun at Hitler, antisemitism, and prejudice in his humor, to get even with terrible things in the world. His comedy career began in the 1950s rising in fame with his merrily immature humor and sharp takes on the world's history and hypocrisy (Dowd, 2023).

The film can be categorized as affirmative parody, a style of parody that deconstructs and explains the format of its source material and then enacts that formula. As Frederick Frankenstein retells the life of his grandfather and vows to never follow in his footsteps. He ultimately does. The duality in the writing offers a combination of satisfaction and comic pleasure to its audience.

Brooks' film utilizes a lot of narrative juxtaposition based on tropes and scenes in past films. *Young Frankenstein's*(1974) opening sequences greatly resemble the opening of its predecessor with a grim robbery of a tomb after the opening titles. However, in a twist, the tomb belongs to Baron Von Frankenstein. In the next scene, we are in a university lecture hall in Baltimore, where the audience meets the great-grandson of Victor Frankenstein (played by Gene Wilder) and learns that he shares his ancestor's talent in the field of science and biology. When a student asks him about his grandfather's experiments Wilder's character says he despises his family's legacy. This juxtaposition between Frederick Frankenstein's namesake and his defiance against his legacy is a clever twist. This narrative in parody benefits and succeeds when the audience has a base of knowledge of the Frankenstein mythos.

Hirshfeld and his camera operators struggled to keep the joke of the satire in mind and had to restrain themselves on occasion from their melodramatic ways of shooting. A parodic exaggerated style of sound design and the cast of eccentric characters came in handy to keep the film a comedy.

*Young Frankenstein*(1974) makes fun of the most iconic characters from famous Universal horror films and gothic literature. The hunchbacked assistant didn't exist in Mary Shelley's original novel. But Dwight Frye's characterization would be recreated. In

Mel Brooks's adaptation, the assistant character played by Marty Feldman would be a huge source of comedy. William Tuttle was the head makeup artist at MGM Studios, he assisted in bringing a cast of comical and strange characters to life. As a method of recreation, the creators devised parodic characters in the cast of this film, which would seem familiar to the audience. While the parodic characters share an abundance of traits of previous Universal film characters for recognisability, some new traits may be added and others eliminated to create something new for the entertainment of the audience (Harries, 2000, p 44).

A couple of stranger characters in *Young Frankenstein*(1974) borrow German language and traits such as the vengeful Inspector Kemp and the mysterious Frau Blucher. Cloris Leachman's Blucher is a parody of spine-tingling antagonists from conventional horror films. Her role in the film is a marker for ghoulish old crones, a typical role for older women in horror films past their 50s. Her mole, her candlelight, and her standoffish nature are typical for the horror genre thus her inclusion in the film is a tribute to characters in the film's source material.

Parody recreates its source material's mise-en-scene and sound design. Comically, throughout the film every time Blucher's name is said nearby horses whiny as if frightened. This running gag makes fun of the melodramatic device of inserting an ominous riff or clap of thunder whenever a villain appears on the screen. And gets ridiculous when used frequently throughout the film. The same device, a flash of lightning and ominous crash of thunder accompanies Fredericks's first encounter with Feldman's Igor. The characters are aware that this gag keeps occurring and bring awareness to it each time. When the characters interpret cinematic codes as literal, this is a style of parody called literalization, another way parody can play with its audience's expectations (Harries, 2000, pp. 71-76).

Frederick and Igor's first grave robbery parallels Henry and Fritz's expedition down to the scientists berating their companions' behavior. "*Down, down you fool*" - *Colin Clive as Henry Frankenstein*. But Feldman's Igor has a larger on-screen presence

than his early counterpart. His character is a huge source of comic relief and meta-humor. “*Damn your eyes!*” “*Too late*”. Both Boyle and Feldman’s characters often look to the camera to call attention to a moment or jape.

*Young Frankenstein*(1974) leans more into comedy rather than trying to be a horror. The novelty is established as the norm in Brooks’ film with the inclusion of quick gags in the film that don’t break the narrative. Igor’s costume design includes a hump that switches sides. It’s a quick parodic gag that doesn’t override the narrative. According to Chris Yogerst in *The Laughing Dead* (Miller et al, 2016, p. 170,) *Young Frankenstein*(1974) and films like it opened the way for filmmakers to incorporate comedy and satire knowing the audience would ‘get’ it and find enjoyment in the result.

Parodic gags can often deflate high moments of suspense in horror parodies, such as *Scary Movie*(Wayans, 2000) for example. A lot of *Scary Movie*’s(2000) humor comes from inverting its audience’s expectations, but after a long sequence of repeated gags, the inversions become the norm of the film and the humor loses its novelty (King, p. 125).

Mel Brooks parodies the visual qualities and genre conventions of 1930s horror to create a very humorous parody film. In the next chapter, I will discuss a period of horror that became popular in the 1970s, and in the following chapter, I will discuss how parody can be used to provide educational commentary on genre conventions as well as humor.

## Chapter Three: Contemporary Horror

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By the 1970s, the horror genre had gained a large audience and mainstream appeal to filmmakers and audiences. The style of the genre had also changed with culture since the 30s. The 70s and 80s saw the emergence of a new type of horror film that became known as the slasher film subgenre. In this chapter, I will discuss some areas of horror that parody films such as *Scream*(1996) and *Scary Movie*(2000) comment on. To analyze the slasher genre I discuss some notable tropes, culture and iconography associated with this period of horror films In chapter four, I will discuss how my selected parodies take different approaches emulating their target genre and I will be discussing how they comment on their target texts’.

The first three decades of horror cinema revolved around science and the supernatural and the monsters that threatened us from the “outside”. The second three decades bring the villains of these films much closer to us (Neale, 2000, p. 89). Post the real-life horrors of World War Two, horror films became entangled with a dangerous sense of realism. Films of the 70s and 80s capitalized on people's fear of being unsafe in their neighborhoods by making films that put monsters on the streets of an average everyday landscape. The threat of the films came less from the sense of foreignness and became a sense of insecurity (Neale, 2000, p. 89). These types of films became known as the slasher genre.

## Characteristics of the Slasher Genre

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In the 80s horror had been reborn, gone was the style of Horror films based on hallowed legends and dated tales that eschewed violence from view. The more contemporary films reject the stylistic devices of old horror tales in favor of assaulting the viewer with the next bloody *vfx*. According to Lake Crane (1994, p. 2), gratuitous violence with a high body count was a staple of horror in that decade; as the name “slasher genre” suggests. Studies link the increased bloody content in horror films to a change in the culture of its audience. After a time of real-life bloodshed, post-60s filmmakers and audiences had an interest in internal chaos, war, and flesh. (Crane, 1994, pp. 32-33). This subgenre of horror films has been highly criticized since its rise in popularity, but it is not the violence that makes these films distasteful, it is the context in which it occurs (Crane, 1994, p. 4). Gratuitous violence is a large part of horror films' imagery and narratives.

The main audiences of slasher films were teens and young adults (Miller et al, 2016, p. 171). An audience that comprised most drive-in cinema attendees and users of the newly introduced home video sets. The target audience was often made to be the focus of the slasher film. These films often follow younger characters in high school who get picked off one by one by a villain who's been stalking them from afar until the film ends when the villain has been subdued or killed, usually by one girl in the friend group who's survived. The young cast are often exploited by being killed in sadistic ways and the female cast are shown in a way provocative before their deaths. The exploitation and sexualization of young characters were criticized heavily but it was a typical image for horror films of the time.



Figure 7: *Carrie* (De Palma, 1976)

According to research on slasher films (Menard, 2019, p. 624) characters who engage in sexual activity are more likely to die has been recognized as one of the biggest rules of the slasher genre since the 80s. Menard's research indicates that yes slasher films do have higher statistics in racier content (Menard, 2019, p. 635). Characters seen nude or partially nude had low chances of survival. However, there's no way to judge the correlation between death and sex statistically. Its presence is associated with the genre due to its recurring presence in both franchises and independent films.

The body counts in these films are high and the deaths are usually primal in taste. This leads the genre to be associated with rape-orientated narratives or in other perspectives according to Wells (2000, p. 79) the killer can also be viewed as evil incarnate. The villains in the slasher genre. Don a mystique that separates them from humanity. Their costumes and iconic masks become their character. The masks that make their character iconic. There's no glimpse of a real human face in *Scream's*(1996) Ghostface's appearance, the title Ghostface in itself describes how departed from humanity they are. It instills fear in the audience and removes normal human understanding from his actions. It defeats lunacy from his actions and also in a ruthless

way allows the audience to root for this murderer. Ghostface is influenced by personas of the slasher genre that came before him. The masked Michael Myers, Jason Voorhees, and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre's* (Hooper, 1974) Leatherface.

To reach the death quota iconic to its genre, slasher film villains operate around certain tropes that allow them not to be defeated before bloodily cutting the cast members. The villains' survival or sudden return for one more final scare.

*“All collective action will fail; knowledge and experience have no value when one is engaged with the horrible; and the destruction of the menace (should it occur) carries no guarantee that the future will be safe.”* - (Crane, 1994, p. 10 )

In popular horror franchises, the villain not dying is a staple of the genre. The audience will expect to see the image of the villain making a return at the end of the film.



Figure 8: *Carrie (1976)* A final jumpscare is a common image in contemporary horror films.



Figure 9: *Friday the 13th* (1980) Alice Hardy gets attacked by vengeful Jason Voorhees at the end of the film.

According to Paul Wells(2000, p. 78), these films' narratives follow a tragic event in the past, the viewing of or the horrible consequences of illicit perversions and ultimately dealing with the overvaluation of family ties. In *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), the monster is grounded in some real event and its return works as a historical refusal. Conspiracy culture is a key element of contemporary horror.

*“The suppression and revelation of knowledge and information, key pieces of information, exposes the corruption at the heart of known and trusted figures and social structures.”* (Wells, 2000, p. 86)

Successful films of the slasher genre follow these formulas. In *Halloween*(1978), Michael Myers is imprisoned in an asylum for murdering his older sister on Halloween night, on the 15th anniversary he breaks out to go after his younger sister and her unsuspecting friends. After the death of her son Jason in *Friday the 13th*(Cunningham, 1980) caused by the camp counselor's negligence, the villain Mrs. Voorhees returns

year after year to enact revenge and punishment on the future camp counselors at Crystal Lake.

To conclude this chapter, contemporary can be recognized by similar settings, narratives, and brutal character deaths. They can be recognized by the characters and masked killers following similar tropes. In the next chapter, I will discuss how directors Wes Craven and Keenen Ivory Wayans interpret these tropes and how they use parody to comment on the genre.

## Chapter Four: Parodies of the Slasher Genre

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Since the popularity of the slasher genre parodies of those films have been made as a result of their success. The tropes and narratives of contemporary are easy to recognize, so creators of parody can easily mock or mimic them in their films. I will be discussing how Wes Craven's *Scream*(1996) and Wayans *Scary Movie*(2000) take different stylistic approaches to parody the horror genre.

### Scream (1996)

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*Scream*(1996) is an acclaimed parody slasher franchise that consists of 6 films and a TV adaptation. Wes Craven directed the first four entries in the series and Kevin Williamson was the writer of the first, second, and fourth installments. The series is recognized as the most extreme and sustained example of affirmative parody (King, p. 124). It's been praised for its recreation of its target sources' mise-en-scene and direction. It's been done to the point where the suspense sequences are barely distinguishable from the films they're parodying.

*"I do not believe the films themselves are comic parodies of the slasher genre. While characters in the Scream films offer ironic observations about the conventions of slasher films, the films themselves remain "straight" slasher films"*

Valerie Wee (Clayton, 2015, p. 150)

Part of the success of *Scream*(1996) in recreating the style of its target genre is thanks to its director's experience with the genre. Wes Craven is regarded for making a huge impact on the genre with *Nightmare on Elm Street* (Craven, 1984). (Eisenberg, 2023). Therefore Craven was no stranger to the rules of popular horror or the bloodbaths they featured. *Scream's*(1996) narrative is composed of fragments of past films' narratives of the 80s. *Scream*(1996) also contained a bunch of memorable characters, who were both tributes to archetypes seen in past horror films and served to disrupt criticized tropes of the genre.

*Scream's*(1996) reputation as a straight horror film rather than simply a parody comes from the high death quota and the tone of these scenes. The opening scene of *Scream*(1996) opens conventionally for a late 20th-century horror. Casey Becker is home alone until she receives a mysterious call. A raspy voice sends an unsettling squirm down the audience's backs. The stranger forces Casey to take a quiz on horror movies. This shows the audience Wes Craven's goal to play with the genre. ( Miller, et al. 2016, p. 172). Despite the self-conscious reference, the rest of the scene plays out as a conventional horror film. Despite Casey's best efforts the masked villain prevails at the end of the scene and her lifeless body is displayed for the audience. The parody recreates the genre's gore to the extreme.



Figure 10: *Scream* (1996).

Wes Craven's *Scream*(1996), follows a similar narrative to conventional slasher films. The film takes place around the anniversary of the protagonist Sidney Prescott's mum's tragic murder. Throughout the film, characters bring up rumors of Maureen Prescott's illicit affairs. It's revealed at the end of the film that her mum's killers have returned to target Sidney and her friends. Sidney throughout the rest of the franchise suffers as a result of her mum's illicit past.

The setting of *Scream*(1996) echoes films of the genre by being set in suburbia and high school. *Scream*(1996) being released in the mid-90s took full advantage of its demographic. Like many films aimed at teenagers, *Scream's*(1996) setting and characters are based around its target audience. With the majority of its cast being in high school.

*Scream*(1996) camera work replicates target horror films. When Sidney and Tatum discuss the possibility of Sidney's mom's killer being still out there, the camera is posed behind the garden fence. It breaches the confidentiality of the girl's conversation and suggests they could be being watched by the killer lurking in the neighborhood. This is a possibility because a wide shot has often been used in horror films to suggest there's something dangerous lurking within the frame. For example, the technique is used in John Carpenter's *Halloween*(1978) where Michael Myers stalks Jamie Lee Curtis's character on her way to school.



Figure 11: The camera work invites us to take the perspectives of a stalker. Film still taken from *Scream*(1996).



Figure 12: The camera work invites us to take the perspectives of the stalker in *Halloween* (1978), looking at Laurie Strode played by Jamie Lee Curtis.

*Scream*(1996) is the best representation of horror's trend in self reflexivity and awareness in the late 20th century. By assuming audiences' familiarity with the conventions of the genre and playing with the genre in increasingly complex ways, they build audience expectation and incorporate comedy hoping the audience would find enjoyment in the result.

In *Scream*(1996) there are characters, such as Randy, who are knowledgeable of horror films and make in-movie references to them. In the movie, Randy brings a lot of genre analysis and ironic humor to the film by comparing their situation to popular horror films. He uses his knowledge to make sense of their situation by encouraging the other characters to model their behavior after the rules of films. In this way, *Scream*(1996) can comment on the tropes and narratives of the horror genre.

*“Number one: you can never have sex. BIG NO NO! BIG NO NO! Sex equals death, okay? Number two: you can never drink or do drugs. The sin factor! It's a sin. It's an extension of number one. And number three: never, ever, ever under any circumstances say, “I'll be right back.” ”*

- Randy displays his knowledge of the genre in *Scream*(1996).

*Scream*(1996) recreates tropes in slasher horror and comments on the relationship between death and immodest behavior. From the start of the film, Sidney appears to have a high chance of surviving the film by dressing modestly compared to her peers and wanting to have a “PG 13” relationship with her boyfriend Billy. The rule connecting virginity to survival is explicitly brought up after Sidney and Billy consummate their relationship when Billy reveals himself as the killer behind the Ghostface mask. He sneers that now that Sidney has had sex with him, she of course has to die. It's an ironic moment when the parody explicitly states the rules of horror, enacts them anyway, and then acknowledges what they have done. This teaches the audience about a pattern exploited in horror films.

Slasher films have been criticized for the misogynistic treatment of their female characters since Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*(1960) (Clover, 1992, p. 61). The female protagonists Sidney and Gale are physically competent and strong-minded. They fight back against their attackers and both survive to the end of the film and make verbal comments to films of the genre mocking misogynistic areas of the horror genre.

*Scream*(1996) takes a subdued approach when it comes to comedy when compared to *Young Frankenstein*(1974) and *Scary Movie*(2000), it's used to deconstruct the slasher genre and bring explicit attention to the rules of the genre. When Randy explains the rules of Horror during a screening of *Halloween*(1978), it creates ironic humor when the characters fail to heed his warnings. He makes pleas for Jamie Lee Curtis's character to turn around, that the killer is right behind her. But as he's yelling at the screen. A real killer is creeping up behind him. The ironic mimicry provides a lot of humor. It also comments on the character's current situation and rewards the audience for their genre knowledge (King, p. 127).

The rest of the films in Wes Craven's series find new ways to translate the genre into parodies that inspire discussions and highlight different areas of the horror genre. Sometimes exhausting tropes in their efforts to create new content.

*Scream*(1996) affirms what is enjoyable about the horror genre and comments on its more discursive areas. *Scream*(1996) is a successful example of an affirmative parody. By recreating the style of its target genre to the extent that it's often regarded as a straight horror film. The parody with a great story of its own allows new audiences to watch and enjoy it. An interesting and familiar narrative with entertaining kills checks boxes for fans of the genre. The added comedy creates a larger potential audience. It encapsulates parody films as a multilayered watching experience.

*Scary Movie*(2000) takes a different approach, rather than doing the recreation *Scream*(1996) did, *Scary Movie*(2000) exaggerates areas of its target genre and performs better as a comedy than a horror.

## Scary Movie (2000)

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Keenen Ivory Wayans takes a different approach to parodying the horror genre than Wes Craven did. Wayans wants the audience to know they're watching a parody and explicitly makes the viewers aware of that. Some of the comedy in parody films cannot get a reaction from the audience unless the viewer has an active recognition of the source material to pick up references. Wayans had a successful comedy career. In 2000 he took the iconography of horror and put it to different uses in the world of comedy in *Scary Movie*(2000). Where *Scream*(1996) is an example of affirmative parody and is recognized as a straight horror by critics, *Scary Movie*(2000) is a full-on spoof.

Wayans makes the audience actively aware they're watching a parody, allowing audiences to catch the references rather than only witnessing the narrative (King, p. 127). This is achieved by the inclusion of meta symbols such as props like the villain's costume (Fig. 13) being a copy of Ghostface from *Scream*(1996) and comments from the characters signal to the audience that parody is occurring.

*"I mean, what do you think, we're in a horror movie?"* - Shannon Elizabeth as Buffy Gilmore, *Scary Movie*(2000).



Figure 13: Ghostface in *Scary Movie* (2000) eating Doritos and drinking pop.

The plot of *Scary Movie*(2000) specifically targets contemporary horror films *Scream*(1996) and *I Know What You Did Last Summer*(Jim Gillespie, 1997) but it also parodies films and TV outside of the horror genre, recreating scenes from films like *The Matrix* and *The Usual Suspects*. The film combines the narratives from the two contemporary horror films to parody 90s slasher films. The film parodies *Scream*(1996) by recreating its opening scene and using a replica of the killer's mask for the film's villain (Fig.13). And adds the backstory from Jim Gillespie's film to the motive of the killer. *Scary Movie*(2000) was also the working title of *Scream*(1996).

Exaggeration is seen in *Scary Movie*(2000)'s cast of characters. Parodies often include parodic versions of preexisting characters with their notable traits exaggerated or played with. The parody of the character Ghostface wears a replica of *Scream's* Ghostface's likeness. *Scary Movie*(2000) parodies specific characters from its proto-texts and exaggerates their stereotypes so much that it's clear that the audience is not meant to take these characters seriously or care about their survival. The large cast of nonsensical stereotypes fuels many of the jokes in the film, the characters bring attention to stereotypes that are seen across films not limited to the horror genre allowing for critical commentary.



Figure 14: Carmen Electra in *Scary Movie* (2000).

In the opening scene, Casey Becker's *Scary Movie*(2000) counterpart Drew Decker runs away from the killer. The opening of *Scary Movie*(2000) mirrors the opening of *Scream*(1996), they're parodying a scene directly from a proto text but the film takes a moment to mock specific horror tropes. According to contemporary horror rules the death of all characters is inevitable (Crane, 1994, p. 10 ). So when given the opportunity between safety and death, an educated audience will expect to see the characters making the wrong decisions. As she's running for her life Drew pauses at two signs that read directions to "safety" and "death" and she runs in the direction of the latter (Fig. 14). This gag joke of literal signs pointing to life or death releases the film's tension and eases audiences into understanding horror conventions. Although education may not have been the comedy director, Wayan's main reason for the making of this film. The script and gags continuously comment on tropes in horror films.

This parody exploits its source material's poor representation for being one notch away from pornography (Menard, 2019, p. 624). In the opening scene, the killer conveniently slashes her top and skirt off and she takes a break from the chase to pose suggestively at the camera. When Ghostface catches up to her and stabs her in the chest, the killer pulls out the knife and her silicone breast implant along with it. *Scary Movie*(2000) mocks the horror genre's misogynistic behavior towards its female

characters and its harmful representation and deliberately sexualizes its characters to an exaggerated extent. Favoring exaggeration and fetishizing performances over narrative continuity.

Wayan's way of inserting gags into the film breaks up tension making it less of a reiterative horror film like *Scream*(1996) and more like a spoof. It reiterates the characters, setting, and events but takes a large departure from the original by combining it with an extraneous amount of comedy.

Whereas *Scream*(1996) is called a tribute to slasher movies. *Scary Movie*(2000) doesn't get the same recognition. Whereas *Scream*(1996) recreates elements of the genre so much so that it's difficult to differentiate from the original. *Scary Movie*(2000) leans fully into the comedy part of parody. With heavy use of comic devices and gags. Relying heavily on exaggeration and misdirection.

## Conclusion

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I have spoken about different types of parodies and how they translate horror to parody. I talked about the art style of *Frankenstein*(1931) and the overall style of the horror genre in the 1930s by focusing on Universal Studios. I discussed Mel Brooks' parody of *Frankenstein*(1931) which acknowledges the impact of the original, pays tribute to it, and recreates the original sets and visual style. *Young Frankenstein*(1974) looks at what audiences love about the original and comically reframes it to reinforce its themes and mise en scene. I then discussed another subgenre of horror that arose in the 1970s. I gave an analysis of common iconography and patterns in slasher horror films and compared two parodies that target the subgenre, highlighting their differences. I analyzed how *Scream*(1996) is a great example of parody recreating its source down to the tone and setting. Its intertextuality and how it operates and draws explicit attention to common tropes in horror allows for subdued comedy. I compared it with *Scary Movie*(2000), which follows a similar narrative to *Scream*(1996) but does not target horror with the intent to recreate it, as it did. But rather to mimic and poke fun at areas of the genre. By analyzing different horror parodies I have been able to study multiple ways that parody adapts its target text.

Parodies require an audience that's familiar with the tropes of the films they're targeting. They can appeal to their target audience and make them want to return to the source material and they're often successful due to the strength of the relationship between horror and comedy.

The intertextual aspect of parody is stronger if the viewer watching the film is familiar with the source material, however parody can be enjoyed by any audience. I grew up watching horror parodies for their comedy, as a result I went into watching

straight horror films as an adult with a greater interest. Since then, I've always been more entertained than terrified watching horror films. Then when I returned to these parodies for research purposes I was much more entertained and appreciative of the efforts of parody films.

I plan to analyze more parodies and how they target their source material and branch out my area of study to other genres. I've already watched *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery*(1997) and I'll branch out my studies into mediums other than film and look at how TV series such as *The Munsters*(1964) reconstruct imagery of the horror genre.

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