

Ha! / Aaah!: The Painful Relationship Between Humor and Horror

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Aaah!!! This is terrifying!!! Everywhere I turn, it's ... it's ... ACADEMIA!!!

Seriously! Look at the last essay—endnotes! The next essay—polysyllabic terminology! I, a former funny folksinger/stand-up comic/screenwriter/author (but not *academic* author) have somehow become trapped inside an academic book. How did this happen?! I mean, other than someone asking me, my agreeing, and then spending weeks writing it.

I guess it's because I know something about comedy. Actually, if you believe my book's title (and you should because all book titles are true, although to be honest I've only found 38 shades of Grey), I know *everything* about comedy. And comedy, it is posited, goes hand-in-claw with horror. Can this be so?

A great man once said "There is no principle of comedy which doesn't also apply to drama." And I agree with me. All artistic expression is rooted in the principles of pattern recognition, misdirection, tension and resolution, and surprise. If that's true (and it must be, because it's in the book *Sidesplitting: sLaughter in Popular Cinema*; John A. Dowell, Cynthia J. Miller, eds.), then horror should have those same elements. So, a scientific test...

Pirate ship. Lookout calls from the crow's nest: "One enemy ship!" Captain says to the First Mate: "Bring me my red shirt. For if there is a battle and I am struck, I fear that the crew will see my wounds and become faint-hearted." Lookout calls from the crow's nest: "*Ten* enemy ships!" Captain says, "And bring me my brown pants."

Pattern recognition, right? Red shirt/blood, brown pants/um... other body fluid.

Meanwhile, in every horror movie ever made, an attractive, scantily-clad young woman walks down a dark hallway; looks left—pattern introduced; looks right—pattern established; insane clown with knife leaps from behind—pattern disrupted (along with jugular vein).

All comedy and all horror establish patterns which introduce tension then resolve in a surprising way, often using misdirection.

So comedy and horror work the same—thank you and good night.

THE END

Okay, where's my check?

What? Five *thousand* words? I thought you said five *hundred*. Wow, that changes everything. Okay, in that case:

Proving that comedy and horror employ the same principles is an extraordinarily complex task, requiring a series of convincing claims drawing from disparate disciplines to persuade skeptical scholars, not to mention adding up to five thousand words and a giant windfall for my bank account, if you define "giant windfall" as dinner at Applebee's.

So here goes.... (Girds loins.) (Ooo, that feels kinda good, gimme a sec....)
(Okay.)

COMEDY VS. DRAMA

Now that I think about it (and I never thought about it until this moment wink wink), humor and horror seem pretty different; one's a pie in the face, the other's an axe in the skull. But maybe they're not mortal enemies...