The Painful Relationship Between Humor and Horror
with David Misch

From 1920’s “Haunted Spooks” to “Zombieland,” the genre of horror-comedy has
never really, you should excuse the expression, died.

Yet humor and horror seem pretty different; one’s a pie in the face, the other’s an
axe in the skull. It’s obvious why watching someone being torn asunder would be horrible
but why is the endless suffering of the Three Stooges funny? Could there be congruencies
between funny and fear, snickers and screams, gore and gags, slapstick and slaughter?

Yes.

This talk proposes — carefully, while remaining alert and well-armed — that the two
genres are not mortal enemies.

For one thing, people in pain are a perennial part of every art; to be fascinated with
human suffering is to be human. Both comedy and horror can show us how to live. (And, of
course, die — from “Psycho” we learn that Death can come at any time. Also, to always
shower with a friend.)

We’ll see that both genres love loss of control, anarchy – the beast within us set
free. And both exploit our paradoxical feelings about helplessness: seeing someone out of
control can be hilarious (a clumsy person falling) or horrifying (a clumsy person falling into
a snake-pit suspended over a shark-pit next to a zombie zoo).

Using video clips and examples ranging from Immanuel Kant to the aforementioned
Stooges, David Misch explores how horror and humor share a mordant view of our relation-
ship to pain; an obsession with the human body and its multifarious fluids; and a sub-
text of death and transcendence underlying the eviscerated flesh and fart jokes.

David Misch has written for the Emmy-nominated “Mork and Mindy,” the Emmy-losing
“Duckman,” the Emmy-engorged “Saturday Night Live” and the Emmy-ineligible “The Mupp-
ets Take Manhattan.” He’s the author of “Funny: The Book” and is collected in “Horrific
Humor: Sidesplitting sLaughter.” David’s also a playwright, songwriter, blogger, teacher and
recovered stand-up comic, and has lectured at the Smithsonian, Yale, Columbia, Oxford,
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Too much more at davidmisch.com and funnythebook.com.