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English 215
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YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN:

A TEAM EFFORT

Mel Brooks' film Young Frankenstein (1975) is a very funny and well-^{made}~~done~~ film. The film would undoubtedly be funny if you were not familiar with the Universal Frankenstein films of the thirties as it contains much slapstick and many visual gags. But is it hilariously so if you are familiar with them. While Brooks' genius was largely responsible for the film, it is the efforts of the entire crew that made it what it is: a brilliant parody and a very successful film.

Brooks and his crew had obviously seen and held an affection for the Universal Frankenstein cycle. One of the reasons that Young Frankenstein performs with such ease is that such love is taken to try and recapture the world of the earlier films. The direction, the film stock (black and white), the lighting, cinematography, sets, etc. all actually look like they are from one (or all) of the previous films. ~~And~~ perhaps the best example of what I mean can be found in Bob Vestel's sets for Young Frankenstein. His village and castle props are prime examples; they are faithful reproductions and help transport

and not needed

us back to the Transylvania of the past. (It is interesting to note that the electrical equipment used in the Frankenstein lab in Young Frankenstein was the original-- it was built by Kenneth Strickfadden for 1931's Frankenstein.) Be Vestel's minature castle seen in the opening long shot is a duplicate of Percy Shelley's that appeared in The Bride of Frankenstein's (1935) opening shot. His bleak, naked trees in some forest scenes look like they were transposed from Bride.

But what really makes the film funny is the way Brooks plays with images associated with the Frankenstein genre. He toys with them, and with us. Albert J. Lavally puts it well in his essay found in the book The Endurance of Frankenstein: "Image after image is saluted then undermined."¹ And Brooks salutes (and undermines) just about everything. All the major characters are here, down to the local police officer with a wooden arm. (Which the monster pulls off again, naturally.) The misty countrysides are here, as is the angry mob of villagers. And Brooks even plays out some scenes that we were not allowed to see, namely the Monster's adventure with the little girl. Not much escapes Brooks' wrath.

too strong a term.

And in many cases Brooks destroys illusions that we had

more detail of undermining needed here.

¹ The Endurance of Frankenstein, page 282.

taken for granted. A moon stays full for the entire film; lightning flashes in the underground library (which has no windows); unlit candles are used to light the way in a dark room; the blind hermit actually acts like a blind hermit, spilling soup and wine; a villager bumps into a tree while hunting the Monster (which probably would happen to someone walking in the forest in the dark.) More and more examples can be found the harder you look at the film.

It is also obvious that the actors were quite familiar with the earlier films. Gene Wilder (who co-authored the script with Brooks) does a Colin Clive clone (sorry!) when his creation comes to life. ("It's alive! It's alive! IT'S ALIVE".) Marty Feldman, while perhaps more inspired by the Marx Brothers than Dwight Frye (who played Frankenstein's deformed helper in the original), still plays the part with several Frye overtones. The walk, the hump (although Frye's didn't have a will of it's own), and especially the tiny cane that Feldman used to climb stairs are good examples. And Peter Boyle as the Monster recaptures some of that innocence that Boris Karloff injected into it. But Gene Hackman, as the blind hermit, steals the show. It looks like he was quite familiar with the scene ^{featuring} ~~starring~~ O.P. Heggie in The Bride of Frankenstein. And Ken Mars playing the part of the local police constable does a wonderful job,

Brooks deserves a lot of credit for his film Young Frank-

more
detail
here

enstein, but the credit just can't rest with him alone. His entire crew and cast also has to be given much credit. It was most definitely a team effort.

another fine paper - solid style and solid organization. However, I wish you had provided some examples of how Young Frankenstein first salutes the genre, then undermines it. you tell me that Brooks toys with the genre, but you don't show me.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Endurance of Frankenstein. George Levine and U.C. Knoepfelmacher,
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